

Bachelor Thesis 2016

MANAGEMENT OF ONLINE CUSTOMER REVIEWS IN THE HOSPITALITY  
INDUSTRY: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN  
THREE AND FOUR STAR HOTELS IN SWITZERLAND



Student: Giulia Robbiani

Submitted on: 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Supervisor: Roland Schegg

Module: E-Tourism

## ABSTRACT

Online review websites have become a powerful source of information and play a big role in the decision-making process of customers above all in the hotel industry (Blal & Sturman, 2014). To get the most valuable stay, potential guests will first look for previous customers' feedbacks before choosing a hotel. Furthermore, it facilitates businesses to improve in the quality of their products and services. The communication between the two parties is now stronger than ever before (Fotis, 2015).

For this thesis, the Valais Tourism Observatory provided data from TrustYou of hotels in Switzerland. The aim of this research paper is to know how online reviews are managed by hotels in Switzerland.

In order to reach the objective, an empirical analysis has been conducted on Booking.com and on TripAdvisor. A sample of 150 three- and four- star hotels has been analysed, with 600 comments coming from Booking.com and 462 from TripAdvisor. The analysis has included comments answered from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 until the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2016. Moreover, three hoteliers have been interviewed in order to have an insight of online reviews management practices.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the most sensible factors according to customer reviews are the rooms, the location and the quality of the staff service. The most positively criticised sectors by guests are the breakfast, the quality of the staff service, the location and the rooms. The most negatively criticised sectors by guests are the rooms, the noise and the price. In addition, it confirms that hotels that have a higher score tend to answer more frequently than hotels that have a lower score. Finally, the analysis shows that hotels tend to answer to positive comments more than negative ones.

Keywords: Review websites, online reputation management, Swiss hotels, TrustScore.

## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nowadays, people take into consideration more the experience of previous guests to make their experience more valuable and unforgettable. Indeed, they trust more online customer reviews than advertisements made by businesses because they have a neutral point of view (Mayer, 2015). According to a study made by Carmelon Digital Marketing (2014), which is a company that gives digital marketing solutions and services to leading companies internationally, “41% read reviews from other travelers before booking a hotel (Vardi, 2014).

Many researches have been made aware of the impact of online reviews on the reputation of hotels. A recent study from Cornell University shows that encouraging the publication of reviews improves not only the ranking of the hotel, but the sales as well (Morand, 2016). It is important for hotels to pay attention and stay active on these reviews websites to stand out from their competitors (Saul, 2016). This is why, nowadays, for businesses to stay “alive”, they need to have an online presence and have to listen to what customers want and need. Therefore, they have to build a close and strong relationship with their guests.

The aim of this research is to know whether hotels take into account reviews and whether they answer to all comments or only a specific type. The main objective is to understand how these reviews are managed and their impact on the online reputation of hotels.

The difficulties encountered in this research paper were to define the important variables and what sub-criteria to include in order to have a pertinent result. Another difficulty was to decide how to evaluate each criteria, for example, how many points must be given to each criteria and to define whether all criteria have the same importance.

At the end of this paper, I would like to thank Roland Schegg who submitted me this subject, guided me, helped me and gave me advices throughout this paper. Without him, the research paper could not have been accomplished. I would like to show my gratitude to Ariane Boesch, Eric Fassbind and Daniel Rousseau to have given me their precious time and to have given me important information for my thesis as well. Finally, I would like to thank my family especially my sister, Cynthia, my brother, Zeno, and my cousin, Nina, to have read my paper.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Foreword and acknowledgements.....	iii
List of tables .....	vi
List of figures .....	vii
Introduction.....	1
1. Literature review .....	3
1.1. The changing behaviour of consumers .....	3
1.2. Impact of social media .....	6
1.3. How important are reviews in the decision-making process of consumers?.....	7
1.4. Disadvantages of online review websites .....	8
1.5. Online reputation management by hoteliers .....	9
2. Research questions .....	16
3. Methodology .....	17
3.1. Detailed grid .....	17
3.2. Master grid .....	17
3.3. Parameters .....	20
3.4. TrustYou Score.....	27
3.4.1. What is it?.....	27
3.4.2. Parameters compared with the TrustScore .....	28
3.5. Source of information .....	28
4. Results .....	29
4.1. Result of the analysis.....	29
4.1.1. Distribution of the total number of hotels in relation to their TrustScore.....	29
4.1.2. Positive versus negative comments .....	31
4.1.3. Sensible sectors according to customers .....	33
4.1.3.1. The most positively criticised sectors	
4.1.3.2. The most negatively criticised sectors	
4.1.4. Rate of answer.....	39
4.1.5. Quality of answer .....	41
4.1.6. Length of answer .....	43
4.1.7. Speed of answer .....	45

4.2. Interviews .....	46
5. Discussion .....	52
5.1 Positive versus negative comments .....	52
5.2. Sensible sectors for customers .....	52
5.2.1. The most positively criticised sectors .....	53
5.2.2. The most negatively criticised sectors .....	54
5.3. Rate of answer.....	54
5.4. Quality of answer .....	55
5.5. Length of answer .....	56
5.6. Speed of answer .....	56
5.7. Interviews .....	56
5.8. Answers to research questions .....	57
5.9. Limitations.....	59
Conclusion .....	60
References.....	61
Appendix I: Detailed grid .....	65
Appendix II: Judgement of the friendliness and the questioning of the hotel .....	66
Appendix III: Master grid .....	67
Appendix IV: List of hotels analysed .....	71
Author's declaration.....	73

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Master grid's characteristics .....	18
Table 2 Master grid Booking.com Part 1.....	19
Table 3 Master grid Booking.com Part 2.....	20
Table 4 Scale for positive and negative comments.....	20
Table 5 Example of calculation for the most sensible sectors for guests (not actual numbers) .....	22
Table 6 Example of how the most positively and negatively criticised sectors have been calculated (not actual numbers) .....	23
Table 7 Criteria to analyse quality of answer.....	25
Table 8 Example of average speed of answer (not actual numbers).....	27
Table 9 Distribution of hotels analysed on Booking.com (blue) and on TripAdvisor (green)..	29
Table 10 Proportion of hotels on Booking.com (blue) and TripAdvisor that have answered (green) .....	30
Table 11 Proportion of positive and negative comments on Booking.com.....	31
Table 12 Proportion of positive and negative comments on TripAdvisor .....	32
Table 13 The most sensible sectors according to customers on Booking.com .....	33
Table 14 The most sensible sectors according to customers on TripAdvisor .....	34
Table 15 The most positively criticised sectors from guests on Booking.com .....	35
Table 16 The most positively criticised sectors from guests on TripAdvisor .....	36
Table 17 The most negatively criticised sectors from guests on Booking.com .....	37
Table 18 The most negatively criticised sectors from guests on TripAdvisor.....	38
Table 19 Rate of answer on Booking.com.....	39
Table 20 Rate of answer on TripAdvisor .....	40
Table 21 Quality of answer on Booking.com .....	41
Table 22 Quality of answer on TripAdvisor .....	42
Table 23 Length of answer on Booking.com .....	43
Table 24 Length of answer on TripAdvisor.....	44
Table 25 Speed of answer on TripAdvisor.....	45

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Circle of trust .....	4
Figure 2 How do you use customer review websites? .....	7
Figure 3 Global Review Distribution by site .....	11
Figure 4 Use of customer review websites in Europe .....	11
Figure 5 Online reviews and retaining customers are key for business owners .....	13

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the world's largest industry and is the fastest growing economic sector in the world. According to UNWTO, its contribution to the world GDP was 9.8% in 2015 and the international tourist arrivals grew by 4.6 % in 2015 to reach 1,184 million (World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2016). It is expecting to reach 1,800 million by 2030. In Switzerland, tourism is the fifth largest sector of exportation and it contributes to 4% of the GDP. However, with the current strength of the Swiss franc, Switzerland has become an unaffordable destination for some tourists. Therefore, there is a bigger challenge for hoteliers to attract tourists.

Thanks to social media, businesses can promote their brand easily and can obtain a better understanding of the expectation of potential new guests. It has become a main source of information for travellers and it plays now an important role on customer's decision-making process. Furthermore, it facilitates businesses to improve in the quality of their products and services. The communication between the two parties is now stronger than ever before (Fotis, 2015).

The power of marketing has changed as well; users have much more influence than before. New strategies have to be found for marketers. B2C engagement and customer service are the key to have a good online reputation (Buhalis & Mamalakis, 2015). Did you know that 77% of users refer often or always to comments on TripAdvisor before choosing a hotel? It is important for hoteliers to manage their online reputation effectively because they can better performs their internal and external operations, which allows them to keep track at the individual unit, brand and chain level (Lynn & Riaz, 2015).

Review websites and how hotels are managing their reputation are the main themes of this paper. Are these review websites a challenge for hoteliers? What do they think about that? To which kind of comments do hotels tend to respond too? Which are the hotels that answer most frequently on these review websites? These questions are answered throughout this research paper.



The first chapter is the literary review, it describes the current situation of online review websites with facts and figures. It explains the changing behaviour of consumer due to the improvement of technology, the impact of social media on users, its importance of the decision-making process of consumers and finally, it describes the best practices according to previous studies conducted by professional researches.

The second and third chapters describe the research questions, the objective of the paper and the methodology used to analyse online review management in Switzerland. The latter includes the explanation of the analysis grids and the variables on which the analysis was based on.

The results of the analysis are presented in the fourth chapter. The structure of the results is presented according to the six variables. Finally, in the last chapter explanation of the results and recommendations are discussed.

# 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

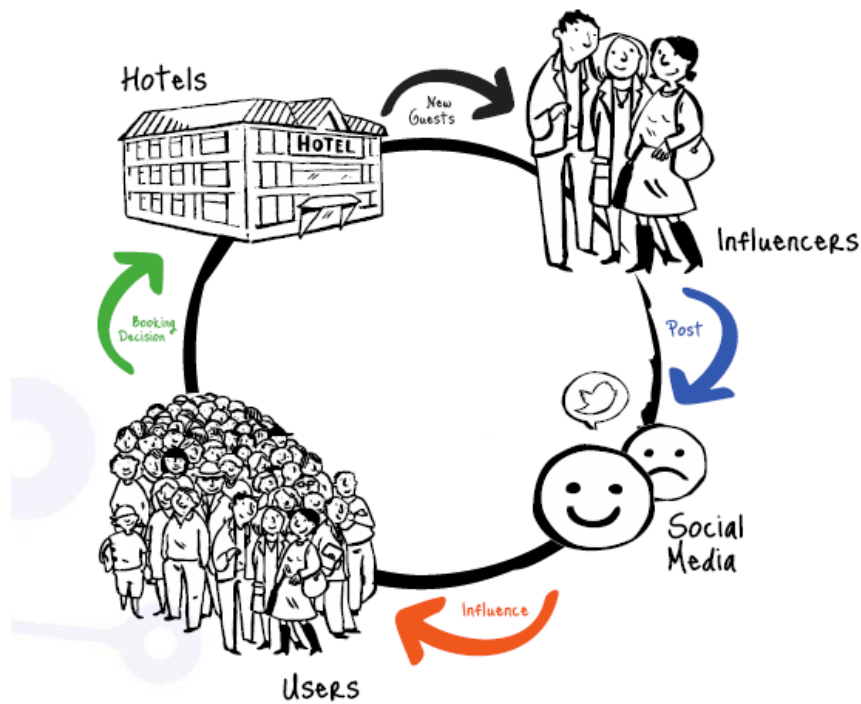
The development of digital devices has led to a changing behaviour of consumers. People, now, have a multitude of ways to get information about the products and services they want to purchase. They look into a variety of sources, one of which is the experience of fellow travellers, which is very important in the decision-making process (Werthner & Klein, 1999). To get the most valuable stay, potential guests will first look for previous customers' feedbacks before choosing a hotel. Thanks to the electronic Word of Mouth, the information has become more transparent, therefore, it is important for hoteliers to change their marketing strategy, as traditional marketing is not as powerful as before (Buhalis & Mamalakis, 2015).

This chapter is divided into five parts. It explains the changing behaviour of consumers, the increasing importance of user-generated-content websites, their impact on users, the disadvantages of review websites and how hoteliers should manage their online reputation. At the end of this first section, the reader will understand the importance of online review websites in the consumers' side and on hoteliers' side.

## 1.1. THE CHANGING BEHAVIOUR OF CONSUMERS

Tourism services are intangible and cannot be tested before purchase. Therefore, it is important for consumers to have the maximum of information before making a decision. To reduce this purchasing risk, users search in a variety of sources. Consequently, the Web has become the most effective source of information (Werthner & Klein, 1999). In the past, going online was something that people occasionally did, it was used in a different way to achieve a task that was previously done in another way. Now, the World Wide Web is offering many more opportunities and benefits for users that were not available before (Ofcom, 2015).

Nowadays, advice from consumers who have already tested the specific products, are the most influential and preferred sources when making a decision before travelling (Crotts, 1999). Figure 1 illustrates the trust from guests to users. Indeed, according to a study made on Blablacar (Mastroianni, 2016), 89% of the people surveyed tended to have more confidence in people they had never met, than their neighbours or co-workers, as long as their online profiles are completed with specific details (pictures, phone numbers, comments from previous travellers). This percentage is similar to the confidence given to family and friends.

**Figure 1 Circle of trust**

Source : Vardi (N.A.)

As we can see, social media has an important impact on travel planning and the decision-making process, it is not “just” considered as an additional source of information for those who use them (Fotis, 2015).

Besides, the consumer behaviour is also changing, consumers are more informed, more independent and more individualistic (Poon, 1993). Their lifestyle is changing as well, people travel more but for shorter periods of time (Saul, 2016). However, what is contradictory is that they are looking to have luxury travel experiences but meanwhile wanting the cheapest hotel rate (Gretzel, 2006).

Now, with the increasing importance of social media, electronic Word of Mouth reviews are a major influence on the decision-making process (Blal & Sturman, 2014): 52% of travellers changed their initial plans based on social media posts and 87% of travellers use the Internet to plan an upcoming trip (Vardi, 2014). However, with the amount of information available on these platforms, it is more and more difficult for users to target the necessary information that fulfil their specific needs (Fotis, 2015).

The interactions with travellers has become an essential strategy in the tourism industry (Lenoir, 2016). According to a study made in SAS Institute and the Pennsylvania State University (McGuire, 2013), online reviews have the biggest influence on users in evaluating a hotel's quality. Now, businesses have to understand consumer-buying behaviours, because it will help them to achieve a good strategy for pricing and positioning. The presence of user-generated content has shifted the environment from a price-transparency to a value-transparency. Consumers are no longer focusing on prices to determinate the quality, but on the value of the services and products offered as a whole (Grier, 2016).

Reviews are a source of information that contribute to the effective management of the entire tourism industry and the competitive advantage of each business (Phillips, Zigan, Santos Silva, & Schegg, 2015). By listening and taking into account comments made by guests, businesses can improve on performance and grow more effectively. Moreover, it encourages consumers to come back thanks to hotels' attention to details from its reviews, which will only raise the profile of the company and might boost consumers to spend more. Indeed, if a hotel understands what their guests wants and needs are based on the feedback, they can personalized the experience and service for the guest, which will increase the chances for the consumers to spend more from the beginning of the booking process to their last day in the hotel (Saul, 2016).

Personalization will be a key factor in marketing for the future. Indeed, personalized content is a good strategy because it is based on customers' interests and motivation. Thus, when hoteliers are able to achieve a clear target down at an individual level, success is ensured. According to Chris Regalado, to reach your target audience, the demographics and psychographics of clients must be understood (Leonardo, 2016).

As hotel marketers, we all know the basic profile of our customers through standard demographic information. Demographics tell us where guests come from, their gender, age, location etc., but they don't really tell us who they are. That's where Psychographics come in. By studying things like purchasing and browsing habits, lifestyle, spending habits, hobbies and values, psychographics can help us uncover why a buyer makes a purchase.

This allows us to create more personalized and targeted content for them. (Chris Regalado, 2016)

## 1.2. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the tourism industry, the percentage of users buying products or services online is higher than any other industry. Studies show that, 79% of people buy their flights online, 64% make hotel bookings online and 62% of this is related to business tourism. Moreover, in 80% of the cases, a Google search leads to an online purchase. The development of new technologies made a fundamental change in the way clients are consuming goods and services (bookings, online reviews, last minutes, low cost, etc.). Consequently, their expectations are higher and they have become more demanding (UNAT, 2014).

With the development of Web 2.0 and social media, society has changed the way they communicate. The Internet has reinforced the relationship between businesses and its consumers with a variety of online channels that contribute to the interactions and transactions between them (Fotis, 2015). To give you an idea, every twenty minutes on Facebook, the leading social media platform, one million links are shared, two million people send friends requests and three million messages are sent (Statistic Brain Research Institute, 2016). As you can imagine, a lot of information is being exchanged.

Web 2.0 not only has dramatically changed the traditional mass media communication, but also the relationship between consumers, in the way they communicate and collaborate with each other (Fotis, 2015). Furthermore, it has brought Word of Mouth, which is the most valuable form of marketing, online (Whitler, 2014). Thanks to the information shared electronically, people changed their ways of searching for products and services (Cantallos & Salvi, 2014). Indeed, user-generated-content websites, are one form of electronic Word of Mouth that has a big impact on how consumers obtain information, evaluate and make decisions on products and services relating to tourism (Sparks, Fung So, & Bradley, 2015). Knowing that each month there are 350 million different visitors on TripAdvisor, that every minute 255 new reviews are posted covering 6.6 million businesses, including one million hotels, Bed&Breakfasts and specialty lodging (TripAdvisor, 2016). Keeping track of all of these reviews has become a great challenge for the hospitality industry.

### 1.3. HOW IMPORTANT ARE REVIEWS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF CONSUMERS?

As we have been discussing, the factor that most influences consumers today when selecting a hotel, is previous guest experiences. It helps to influence booking decisions, it reduces uncertainty and it gives an impression to potential consumers about how their stay will be once they arrive (Sigmund & Fritsch, 2013). Even if they will not book their travel online, most consumers will at least have a look at review websites before making a decision. According to a survey, accommodation (68%) is the sector where consumers pay most attention to reviews, then restaurants (61%), cinemas (23%) and sports clubs (22%). With the development of mobile devices, potential customers can access the Internet whenever they wish, which enhances the importance of online reviews for travel decisions. Besides, users are more likely to trust experiences shared by other travellers than official marketing advertisements from businesses or experts, because what clients write is objective (Saul, 2016).

**Figure 2 How do you use customer review websites?**

How do you use customer review sites?

	AGE 18 to 24	AGE 25 to 34	AGE 35 to 44	AGE 45 to 54	AGE 55 to 64	AGE 65+	Average total
I look specifically for good reviews to help me decide where to go and then consider other factors such as cost and location.	18%	29%	21%	16%	12%	8%	18%
I decide where I want to go based on factors such as cost and location and then check to see if there are any bad reviews that would put me off.	57%	52%	56%	55%	57%	52%	54%
Neither of these.	4%	6%	8%	11%	6%	10%	8%
N/A – I do not tend to use customer review services/sites.	21%	13%	15%	18%	25%	30%	20%

Source : Saul (2016)

Online reviews are a precious source of information to help consumers evaluate and make a decision about their leisure travels. Furthermore, they are having a considerable impact on consumer behaviour, especially amongst younger people (Saul, 2016). Indeed, more than 25% of 18 to 24 year olds, consider online reviews as one of the three most influencing factors when deciding where to stay, compared to 18% of 65 year olds and over (Fox). Figure 2 shows

very clearly how people are using customer review websites and the importance of the feedback in the decision-making process of users. The importance of customer feedback will increase as they are having a considerable impact on consumer behaviour, especially amongst younger generations as they are having a greater spending power.

More and more people are likely to leave a feedback than before, the main reason is that they know how important and influential reviews can be for other customers. Furthermore, it increases the volume and the quality of online reviews (Saul, 2016). According to a study made at ITB Berlin, around 96% of internet users consider reviews websites as “important”, “very important” or “essential”. Half of the surveyed people see customer reviews websites as “important, but they should be handled with care”. 90% use customer review websites “always” or “often” to help them in making their booking decisions and only 1% consider them to be “non-credible” (Conrady, 2014).

#### 1.4. DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE REVIEW WEBSITES

Online reviews can make or break the reputation of a hotel. If online review websites can boost hotels, it can also have a negative effect on them (Wilson, 2010). Misusing or abusing, both from the owner and guests, to increase or decrease the score of the business online or to ask for a discount, are also frequent. Most online review websites have taken measures to avoid this type of behaviour, but it is still an actual issue for hoteliers. To effectively manage such abuse from guests, a professional and balanced response is the best solution. Besides, to denigrate a hotel, the opinion of the client has to be quite strong, this can be especially serious for small businesses. Hoteliers need to ask themselves, whether the comments are fair and truthful, before taking action (Ross, 2014).

Fake reviews are also a major issue that should not be avoided, they represent between 1% and 16% of all guest reviews. Additionally, there is also the possibility for a business to encounter a fake-reviewer group (people who work collaboratively to write fake reviews). This practice can be even more damaging as it has the possibility of taking a total control of the reputation of the business (Mukherjee, Liu, & Glance, 2012). It is an actual issue to recognise whether a comment is fake because there are no common standards to qualify them as false. According to the UK Competition and Markets Authority, there are two types of fake reviews

being written: the first is describing false and/or negative comments and the other makes false or positive comments (Valant, 2015).

Fake consumer reviews are one of the factors that distort the market the most in the e-commerce industry. One of the benefits of online reviews is to boost competition between businesses regarding their products and services, which are evaluated by customers who point out their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, if online reviews are not reliable anymore, it can lower the competition within the market because businesses that have a lot of presence and a good online reputation would be the only trusted ones (Valant, 2015).

Consumers' reviews are important as a comparison tool, which influence a consumer's choice about a product or service. Therefore, these tools, with the aim of increasing customer awareness and trust, should not mislead consumers with fake reviews. As more and more people are buying online, it is not an issue to underestimate. Fortunately, guidelines have already been adopted worldwide (Valant, 2015).

## 1.5. ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT BY HOTELIERS

Social media is one of the most popular and favoured ways for online users to spend their time. It enables them to stay in contact with friends and families and remain informed about other contents. At this time, there are more than 1.6 billion social network users in the world; with 64% of Internet users who have access to social media (Statista, s.d.). In addition, 50% of travel companies have generated bookings through social media (Vardi, 2014).

Thanks to the valuable data that online reviews provide, businesses can identify gaps in their service and take action to better meet the needs of their guests (Mayer, 2015). However, according to a study, 63% hoteliers deal with a review in the moment and do not keep a record of feedback for each specific consumers. It is six to seven times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to keep a current one (Help Scout, s.d.). Therefore, it is important for hoteliers to have a good Customer Relationship Management system in order to know the needs and expectations of their guests. Businesses that do not take into consideration online reviews are missing opportunities to develop themselves, personalize their offers and stay at the head of the competition (Saul, 2016). That being said, only 32% of business owners are managing their online status (Gonzalo, 2015). There are tools such as TrustYou that can help



monitoring social media and track what guests are saying about a specific company in the Web, which save a lot of time! (Horster, 2012, p. 219)

### *TrustYou*

TrustYou is a tool to manage reviews on platform such as Booking.com or TripAdvisor. It is an online reputation management system for hotels, destinations and travel websites to improve travel experience. It analyses travel reviews and transforms this information into data visualization. It offers different products (TrustYou, s.d.):

- TrustYou Meta-Review summarizes review content
- TrustYou Messaging: A platform that allows hoteliers to communicate with their guests during their stay
- TrustYou Stars: A platform that gives insights to hoteliers regarding the post-stay feedback of customers and are visible to other travellers as well
- TrustYou Analytics & Radar analyses all guest feedback across the web to give an insight to hoteliers

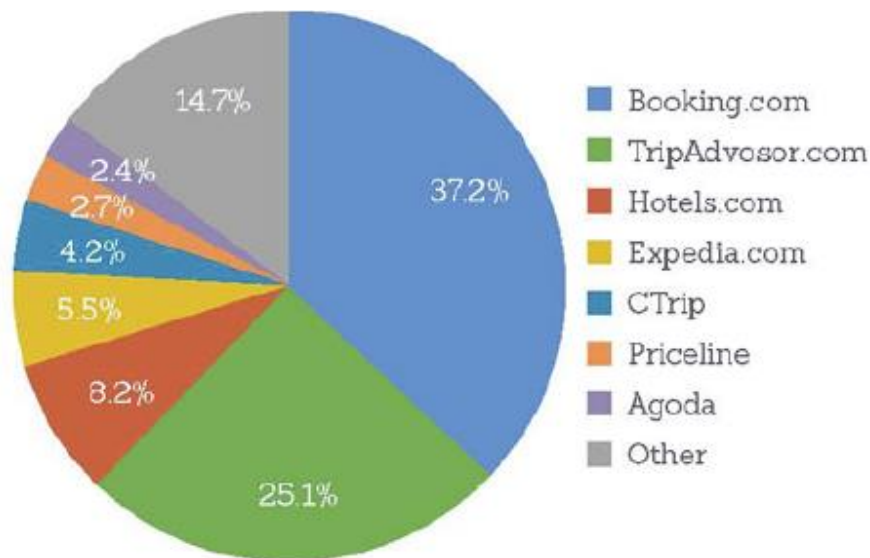
### *Booking.com and TripAdvisor*

Booking.com B.V. is part of The Priceline Group which is the world's leading provider of online travel. Booking B.V. owns and manage Booking.com <sup>TM</sup>, which is the world leader of booking online accommodation. Each day more than 1,200,000 room nights are reserved on the website. Since the beginning of 2014, hoteliers are allowed to answer to comments (Booking.com, s.d.).

TripAdvisor is the world largest review site. Each month 350 millions users visit the website and has 385 million reviews and opinion about 6.6 million accommodation, restaurants and attractions (TripAdvisor Inc, 2016).

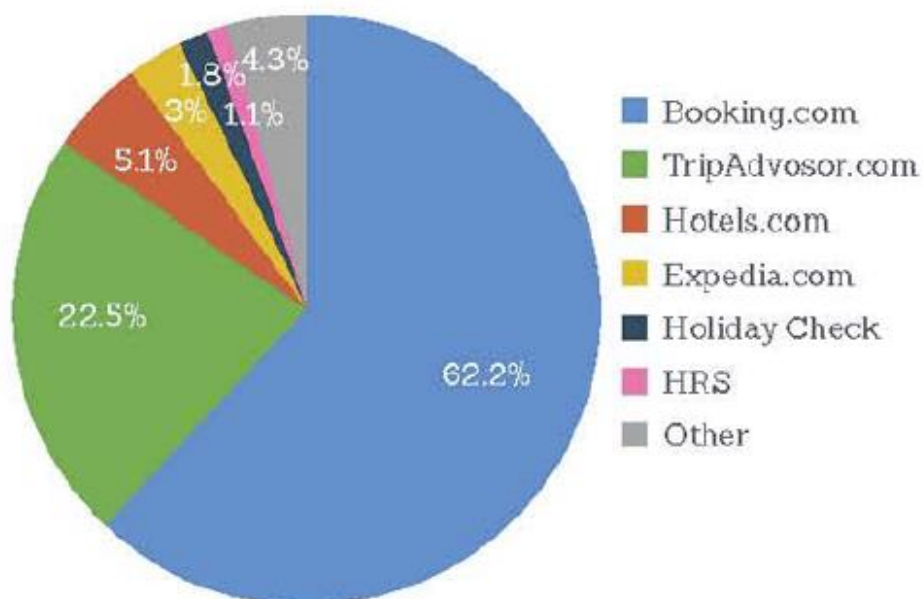
In regard to TripAdvisor and Booking.com they are the most important customer review sites (Conrady, 2014). Figure 3 represents the proportion of comment from Booking.com and TripAdvisor. About 62% of comments come from Booking.com and TripAdvisor globally. Figure 4 shows the use of customer review websites in Europe. Booking.com and TripAdvisor represent a bit less than 85% (TendenceHotellerie, 2015).

**Figure 3 Global Review Distribution by site**



Source: Tendence Hotellerie (2015)

**Figure 4 Use of customer review websites in Europe**



Source : Tendence Hotellerie (2015)

*Recommendations*

Hoteliers should use more user-generated content by (Murphy, 2015):

- Encouraging guests to write online feedbacks
- Responding to online feedback in an appropriate and professional manner
- Taking action according to clients' reviews
- Getting familiar to major review websites such as TripAdvisor
- Learning how to get the most value out of user-generated content

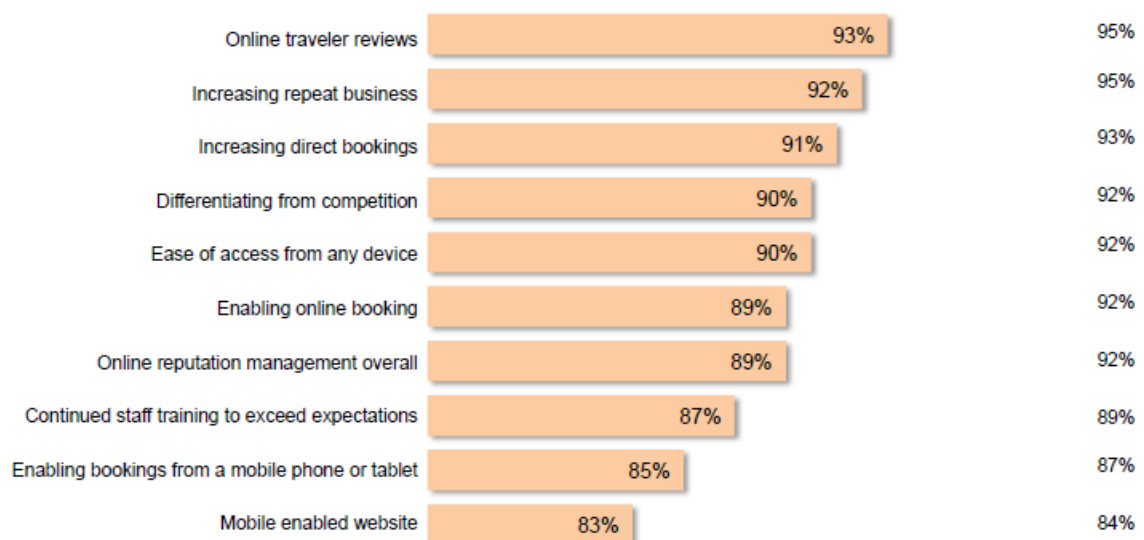
What is also important is the rapidness of the answer. Business owners need to respond effectively (Lynn & Riaz, 2015). The faster, the better, since the longer hoteliers wait to respond, the more users are only seeing one side of the feedback (Gonzalo, 2015). Thus, what is essential to think about, is to prioritize positive reviews at the top, 70% of users read up to twenty reviews per hotel (Conrady, 2014). So, potential users will pay more attention to the first few comments because they are considered as the most reliable ones as there are the most recent (Gonzalo, 2014). Besides, when guests have to decide between two hotels, generally the hotel that has more of an online presence will be chosen (Sigmund & Fritsch, 2013).

Online reputation management is now an important tool in the marketing strategy to know the performance of customer service, public relations, sales and even recruitments (Gonzalo, 2015). Therefore, hoteliers should not hesitate to invest in the different social media platforms for their online advertising. Electronic Word of Mouth is a strong marketing tool and must not be underestimated (Buhalis & Mamalakis, 2015). 86% of people between the age of 18 and 34 years old consider that user-generated content is generally a good indicator of the quality of a product or service (Price, 2016).

The Pennsylvania State University and the SAS Institute found that the most influential factor on consumers when evaluating hotel's quality is online reviews. Prices are not considered a valuable variable in a hotel's evaluation of quality. Now, to have a good reputation, focusing on the problems raised in online reviews is the key to the growth of the hotel, reducing prices is no longer a sign of improvement in the eyes of consumers (Vardi, 2014).

Figure 5 shows the top 10 factors that hoteliers consider important for their business. Online presence remains important and is still the biggest area of investment for accommodation owners in 2016, with 59% investing more in this area than they did in 2015 (TripAdvisor, 2016).

**Figure 5 Online reviews and retaining customers are key for business owners**



Source : TripAdvisor (2016)

Online reviews is also a good tool for hoteliers to benchmark themselves and to determine which department they want to improve in comparison to their competitors. It is also a good source of information for managers to know where guests are satisfied and where the hotel needs improvement or support to ensure that guests' expectations are satisfied. For example, if a manager notices that three-star hotels need improvement in their service, thanks to clients' feedbacks, it can offer an opportunity to train their employees, which will lead to a positive impact on key points that are being seen as most negative by most consumers (Mayer, 2015).

Many studies have been conducted to analyse the impact of online reviews on hotel performance. According to a study made at Cornell University (Anderson & Han, 2016), review scores and the number of reviews are positively related to a hotel's performance (price, occupancy, and total revenue). Therefore, hoteliers should encourage clients to write online feedbacks. The same study demonstrated that not only boosting clients to post reviews is positively related to an increase in the scores of those reviews, but also these reviews are generally better than those posted without encouragement. Moreover, hotels have also

noticed improvements in their Average Daily Rate, occupancy and their Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR). However, according to the Ecole Hotelier Lausanne, more reviews do not necessarily have an impact on the RevPAR. Indeed, for economy and midscale hotels, higher the number of reviews the better. But for upscale and luxury ones, the quality of the review has a bigger impact on hotel performance, than the number. Furthermore, Anderson and Han (2016) affirm that not all reviews should be answered. Indeed, if hoteliers respond to more than 40%, the revenue starts to decrease. Thus, hoteliers are better off responding to negative reviews than to positive ones, as it may become unfavourable for them.

Besides, consumers appreciate more when hotels answer to negative comments, instead of acknowledging positive ones. Letting clients know, that they are important for the hotel improves the volume and the quality of reviews, and furthermore, when they have the feeling to be listened, it has a favourable effect on review scores and revenue (Anderson & Han, 2016). Did you know that 70% of buying experiences are based on how the customer feels they are being treated? (Help Scout, s.d.). Moreover, according to Anderson (2012), if a hotel increases its review score by one point on a five-point scale (e.g. from 3.3 to 4.3) or if the hotel has a higher reputation than its competitor with the same price, the hotel can increase its price by 11.2% and still maintain the same occupancy or market share. So, on TripAdvisor, Yelp or Booking.com, hoteliers should favour all reviews that have from one to three (one to six for Booking.com) stars and letting apart the four- and five- star reviews, depending on the content and context. On online travel agencies sites, it is less important as management responses are not published and, therefore, have less visibility (Gonzalo, 2015).

### *Review management in Switzerland*

Over 11,000 hotels in 48 cities in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and India have been analysed by PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers), an audit and advisory company.

In Geneva, guests gave hotels an average Global Review Index (a score reflecting a hotel's overall online reputation) score of 79% and for three-star hotels 76% (which corresponds to 48% of the total number of hotels in Geneva). According to online reviews, location and cleanliness are rated the best. However, value and the quality of the room had the lowest rates. Guests tend to expect more for their money, when they pay for more stars. Regarding the average responses, 14% of hotel managers responded, which is 50% more compared to

2014, with a growth of 122% for three-star hotels. Nevertheless, four-star hotels answer more frequently (10,8%) than three-stars (7,0%). Regarding the proportion of positive reviews answered versus negative ones, positive answers had slightly more responses (Mayer, 2015).

In Zurich, hotels have a Global Review Index score of 82%, which is higher than most other cities in Western and Central Europe. Three-star hotels (which correspond to 54% of the total number of hotels in the city) were rated at 80%. Regarding the online reputation, they have the same features as hotels in Geneva. The answer rate for the city is on average 21%, which is more than a half compared to 2014. Four-star hotels answer more frequently (28,1%) than three-star hotels (15,6%). The proportion of positive versus negative reviews answered is about the same (Mayer, 2015).

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research is to know whether hotels take into account reviews and whether they answer to all comments or only a special type. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to have a deeper understanding of how online reviews are managed in Switzerland. To reach this objective, it is necessary to answer the following research questions:

1. Do hoteliers respond to customer feedback on online evaluation platforms such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com?
2. How do hoteliers answer online reviews?
3. To which type of comments do hotels answer comments?
4. How do hotels manage the pressure of negative reviews from clients?
5. Are hotels that answer to customer reviews better rated than hotels that do not answer to any comments?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the method used to reach the objective is explained. The author has analyzed both comments and answers of 150 hotels on Booking.com and on TripAdvisor. For each hotel the 10 most recent comments answered have been analysed. For those who had less than 10 comments, the analysis has included comments answered from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2013 until the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2016.

For that matter, two analysis grids have been created. The first one is the detailed grid, which examines with different parameters each comment and their answer individually for each hotel. The second one is the master grid, where all the results from the detailed grid are reported.

#### 3.1. DETAILED GRID

It has the purpose of analysing each hotel's answers individually per review website. In this table different parameters are calculated: The customer comment content, the quality of answer, the speed of answer and the length of answer (Appendix I). The description of each parameters is explained later on this paper.

#### 3.2. MASTER GRID

All information from the detailed grid are reported in the master grid. In addition, the rate of answer and the number of positive and negative comments each hotel has answered, are calculated as well (Appendix III).

At the end of this analysis, the following parameters are calculated:

- Positive or negative comments
- Customer comment content
- Rate of answer
- Quality of answer
- Speed of answer
- Length of answer



The master grid is then downloaded in Sphinx (software for survey and data analysis) in order to analyse the parameters and find any correlation with the TrustYou score. Table 1, 2 and 3 shows a part of the master grid, respectively the part for Booking.com. Appendix III shows the master grid with the TripAdvisor's table included.

**Table 1 Master grid's characteristics**

Characteristics		1
	Name	Trente Trois 33
	Stars	3
	Rooms	39
	Location	City
	TrustYou score	0,63390
	Booking.com score (out of 10)	6,3
	TripAdvisor score (out of 5)	3,5

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

**Table 2 Master grid Booking.com Part 1**

Booking.com	Rate of answer	Nb of customers' comments since 2013	1720
		Nb of hotel's answers since 2013	207
		<b>Rate of answers</b>	<b>0,120348837</b>
	Positive vs Negative Comment	Positive Comments	3
		Negative Comments	7
	Customer content comments	Bar and Beverages	0
		Bar and Beverages / Nb of comments replied	
		Breakfast	0
		Breakfast/ Nb of comments replied	
		Cleanliness	0
		Cleanliness / Nb of comments replied	
		Entrance Area	0
		Entrance Area / Nb of comments replied	
		Food	0
		Food / Nb of comments replied	
		Hotel Building	-3
		Hotel Building / Nb of comments replied	-0,3
		Hotel	0
		Hotel / Nb of comments replied	
		Location	4
		Location / Nb of comments replied	0,4
		Restaurant	0
		Restaurant / Nb of comments replied	
		Noise	-1
		Noise / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Price	-2
		Price / Nb of comments replied	-0,2
		Room	-1
		Room / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Service included	2
		Service included / Nb of comments replied	0,2
		Staff service	0
		Staff service / Nb of comments replied	
		Value	-1
		Value / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Vibe	0
		Vibe / Nb of comments replied	
		WiFi	0
		WiFi / Nb of comments replied	
		Other	0
		Other / Nb of comments replied	
		Total comment's content	-0,2
		<b>Total comment's content / comment replied</b>	

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

**Table 3 Master grid Booking.com Part 2**

Booking.com	Quality of answer	Tone of the answer	2
		Focus of the answer	6
		Language	10
		Name of client	0
		Thanked	2
		Rewarded	0
		Wished	0
		Signature from the hotel	8
		Questioning	0
		Mistake	6
		Quality score total	34
		<b>Quality score / answers analysed</b>	<b>3,4</b>
	Length	Length	4199
		<b>Length/ answers analysed</b>	<b>419,9</b>
	Speed	Has the hotel answered within 3 days?	
		Has the hotel answered within 7 days?	
		Has the hotel answered within 28 days?	
		<b>Speed / comments analysed</b>	

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

### 3.3. PARAMETERS

#### *Positive versus negative comments*

Each comment that received an answer was judged whether it was positive or negative. Table 4 shows the scale to judge whether a comment was positive or negative depending on the review website.

**Table 4 Scale for positive and negative comments**

	Booking.com score	TripAdvisor score
Positive Comments	7-10	4-5
Negative Comments	1-6	1-3

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

According Mr. Gonzalo, a negative comment on TripAdvisor corresponds to a mark between one to three and on Booking.com it relates to a mark from one to six (Gonzalo, 2015). Therefore, the judgement of each comment was based on this theory.

At the end the proportion of positive and negative comments is calculated. The result will tell whether hotels tend to answer more to positive comments or tend to answer more to negative comments. The total comments analysed on Booking.com is 600 and on TripAdvisor is 462.

### *Customer comment content*

This parameter includes 18 sectors that relate to all services and products put at disposal for clients that are criticised by guests after their stay.

#### Sectors:

- Bar and Beverages
- Breakfast
- Cleanliness
- Entrance Area
- Food
- Hotel Building<sup>1</sup>
- Hotel <sup>2</sup>
- Location
- Restaurant
- Noise
- Price
- Room
- Service included in the price<sup>3</sup>
- Staff service<sup>4</sup>
- Value
- Vibe<sup>5</sup>
- WiFi
- Other<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hotel Building is corresponding to the appearance of the building and its style.

<sup>2</sup> Hotel characteristics relates to the hotel as a whole. For example, when the client says: "The hotel is good."

<sup>3</sup> This criterion corresponds to all services that the client gets free in addition of what he or she paid such as welcome drink, free transport part, minibar, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Staff service relates to the service quality of employees

<sup>5</sup> It corresponds to the atmosphere in the hotel whether the overall service of the hotel enhance a good feeling.

<sup>6</sup> It includes remarks related to the storage room, the schedule of the reception, the parking, the conference rooms and whether the hotel was adapted for kids.

At the end, the parameter gives three different results. The first one shows the most sensible sectors according to customers. The second result gives the sectors that have been the most positively criticised by guests. The third one gives the most negatively criticised sectors.

Each sector that came out in the comment was marked with one point if the comments was positively criticised or minus one if the comment was negatively criticised. If the sector was not mentioned in the comment, 0 point was given.

The total for each sector has been calculated per hotel. As some hotels had answered less than 10 times during the period analysed, the total of each sector has been divided by the number of comments analysed per hotel.

Table 5 shows an example of how the most sensible sectors have been calculated with the example of staff service.

**Table 5 Example of calculation for the most sensible sectors for guests (not actual numbers)**

	<b>Hotel 1</b>	<b>Hotel 2</b>	<b>Total for staff service</b>
<b>Number of comment analysed</b>	10	6	
<b>Total point of staff service</b>	6	-4	
<b>Total point of Staff Service / Number of comment analysed</b>	$6/10 = 0.6$	$-4/6 = -0.67$	$0.6 +  -0.67  = 1.27$

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 6 shows how the most positively and the most negatively criticised sectors have been calculated with staff service and location. In this example, the most positively criticised sector by guest is location (1.47) and the most negatively criticised sector is staff service (-0.53).

**Table 6 Example of how the most positively and negatively criticised sectors have been calculated (not actual numbers)**

	Hotel 1	Hotel 2	Hotel 3	Total positively criticised	Total negatively criticised
<b>Number of comment analysed</b>	10	10	6	16	
<b>Total point of staff service</b>	6	-2	-2		
<b>Average staff service</b>	$6/10=0.6$	$-2/10=-0.2$	$-2/6=-0.33$	0.6	$-0.2+(-0.53)=-0.53$
<b>Total point of Location</b>	-4	8	4		
<b>Average Location</b>	$-4/10=-0.4$	$8/10=0.8$	$4/6=0.67$	$0.8+0.67=1.47$	-0.4

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

### *Rate of answer*

The rate of answer is the percentage of answers made by the hotel. It relates to the number of comments answered by the hotel compared to the total number of comments. It is calculated by dividing the number of comments answered by the number of comments from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2013 until the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2016.

The minimum is 0% and the maximum is 100%. Out of the 150 hotels analysed, six hotels could not be found on Booking.com and three hotels on TripAdvisor. Therefore, to analyse the rate of answer for each review websites, the total for Booking.com is 144 and for TripAdvisor is 147.

The rate of answer of each hotel has been compared with the TrustYou score of each hotel on Sphinx in order to see whether there was a correlation between the two parameters.

#### *Quality of answer*

It determines the quality of the answer. It contains 10 criteria (C.f. Table 7) that have either zero point or one point each. Therefore, the minimum point an answer can have is zero and the maximum is 10. Each criteria is related to a closed-ended question worth zero or one point each. As some hotels had answered less than 10 times during the period analysed, the total has been divided by the number of comments answered for each hotel. The total gives the average quality score for the hotel.

On Booking.com out of the 144 hotels, 72 hotels have answered to comments. To analyse the average quality of answer for each hotel, the total is 72. On TripAdvisor, out of the 144 hotels analysed 60 hotels have answered to comments. To analyse the average quality of answer for each hotel on TripAdvisor, the total is 60.

The average quality of answer of each hotel has been compared with the TrustYou score of each hotel on Sphinx in order to see whether there was a correlation between the two parameters.

**Table 7 Criteria to analyse quality of answer**

Criteria	Question/Affirmation	Comment
Tone of the answer	Was the answer friendly?	It characterizes whether the answer is friendly or unfriendly. If it is judged friendly, it is worth one point. If the answer to the question is no, it is worth 0 point. Three people have been asked to judge the tone of the answer to have an objective result (Appendix II).
Focus of the answer	At least one of the critical points from the customer is treated by the answer.	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Language	Has the hotel answered in the same language as the comment?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Name of client	Has the hotel mentioned the name of the client?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Thanking	Has the hotel thanked the client to have written a comment?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Rewarding	Has the hotel offered a reward for the next stay?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Wishing	Has the hotel wished to see the client soon?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Signature of the hotel	Has the hotel signed, either the name of the hotel or written the staff team?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point
Questioning	Is the hotel questioning itself?	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point Three people have been asked to judge whether the hotel is questioning itself, to have an objective result (Appendix II).
Mistakes	The hotel did not do any mistake in the answer.	Yes: 1 point No: 0 point

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)



*Length of answer*

It is the number of characters (without space) that the answer contains. The total of characters is divided by the number of answers analysed, so that the result gives an average and does not depend on the number of answers.

On Booking.com out of the 144 hotels, 72 hotels have answered to comments. To analyse the average length of each answer for each hotel, the total is 72. On TripAdvisor, out of the 144 hotels analysed 60 hotels have answered to comments. To analyse the average length of answer for each hotel on TripAdvisor, the total is 60.

The average length of answer of each hotel has been compared with the TrustYou score of each hotel on Sphinx in order to see whether there was a correlation between the two parameters.

*Speed of answer*

It determines whether the hotel has answered quickly or not. In order to calculate it, three criteria have been settled:

1. The hotel has answered within 3 days. It corresponds to a fast answer.
2. The hotel has answered within 7 days. It corresponds to the average period of answer.
3. The hotel has answered within 28 days. It corresponds to a slow answer.

The author has decided the number of days that are related to a fast, average or slow answer. Each affirmation is worth one point. The minimum point an answer can have is zero point and the maximum is three points. This variable has been calculated only for TripAdvisor, as on Booking.com the date of the answer was not visible.

Table 8 demonstrates an example of how the average speed of answer has been calculated.

**Table 8 Example of average speed of answer (not actual numbers)**

<b>Hotel 1</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Answer 1</b>	<b>Answer 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Has the hotel answered within 3 days?</b>	Yes: 1 No: 0	0	1	1
<b>Has the hotel answered within 7 days?</b>	Yes: 1 No: 0	1	1	2
<b>Has the hotel answered within 28 days?</b>	Yes: 1 No: 0	1	1	2
<b>Average (Total/ nb of hotel answers)</b>				5/2=2.5

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

On TripAdvisor, out of the 144 hotels analysed 60 hotels have answered to comments. To analyse the average Speed of Answer for each hotel on TripAdvisor, the total is 60.

The average speed of answer of each hotel has been compared with the TrustYou score of each hotel on Sphinx in order to see whether there was a correlation between the two parameters.

### 3.4. TRUSTYOU SCORE

#### 3.4.1. WHAT IS IT?

It is a score based on all opinions found on the Internet. To calculate it, TrustYou takes into consideration all information on the social web made about a specific hotel. It includes reviews, comments, surveys, and tweets about a hotel. Thanks to smart technological tools, Trustyou determines a complete picture of global consumer opinion of a hotel. The TrustScore is a number between zero and 100. A low Trustscore relates to a less trustworthy offer whereas a high TrustScore indicates that the guest can trust the hotel or the brand (TrustYou, 2012). The most recent reviews have a greater weighting than older ones as they are more relevant for readers (TrustPilot, 2016).

### 3.4.2. PARAMETERS COMPARED WITH THE TRUSTSCORE

In this analysis some parameters have been analysed in relation to the TrustScore of each hotel. Those parameters are:

- Rate of answer
- Length of answer
- Quality of answer
- Speed of answer

### 3.5. SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Valais Tourism Observatory provided a list of three- and four- star hotels located in Switzerland that includes the name of the hotels, their addresses and their TrustYou score in 2015. The dataset gives insights about the overall customer evaluation of each hotel (c.f. chapter 3.3). A sample of 150 three- and four-star hotels (67 from cities, 38 from villages and 45 from mountain regions) including highly and badly rated hotels have been analysed on TripAdvisor and Booking.com (Appendix IV). In Switzerland, three- and four-star hotels count more beds and overnight stays than the other categories of hotels, that is why they are represented in this paper (Liechti, 2015).

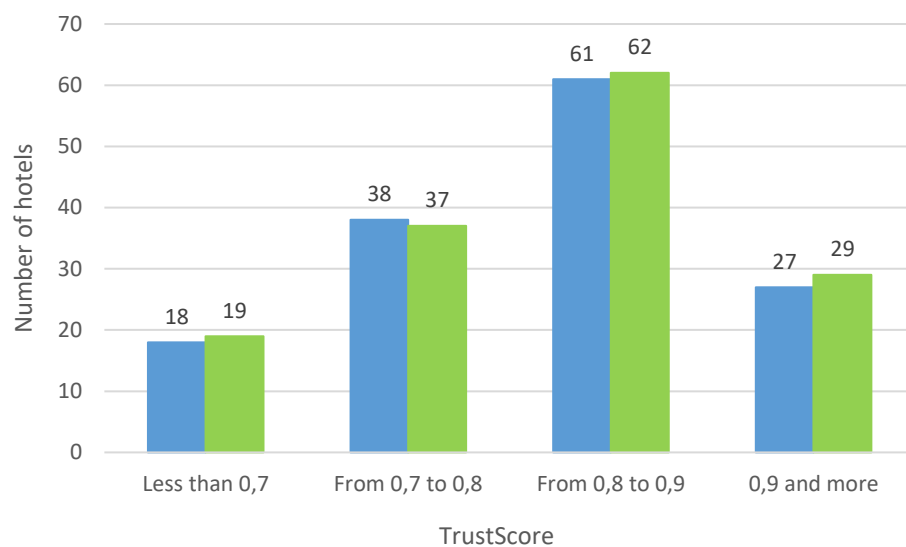
In order to distinguish a hotel located in a city or a village, the definition of “Union des villes suisses” have been used. According to the latter, to differentiate a city from a village, the number of inhabitants is the key. A district of more than 10, 000 inhabitants is a city, less is considered as a village. It is based on this definition that the author could know whether a hotel is located in a city or a village (Union des villes suisses, 2014).

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. RESULT OF THE ANALYSIS

#### 4.1.1. DISTRIBUTION OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HOTELS IN RELATION TO THEIR TRUSTSCORE

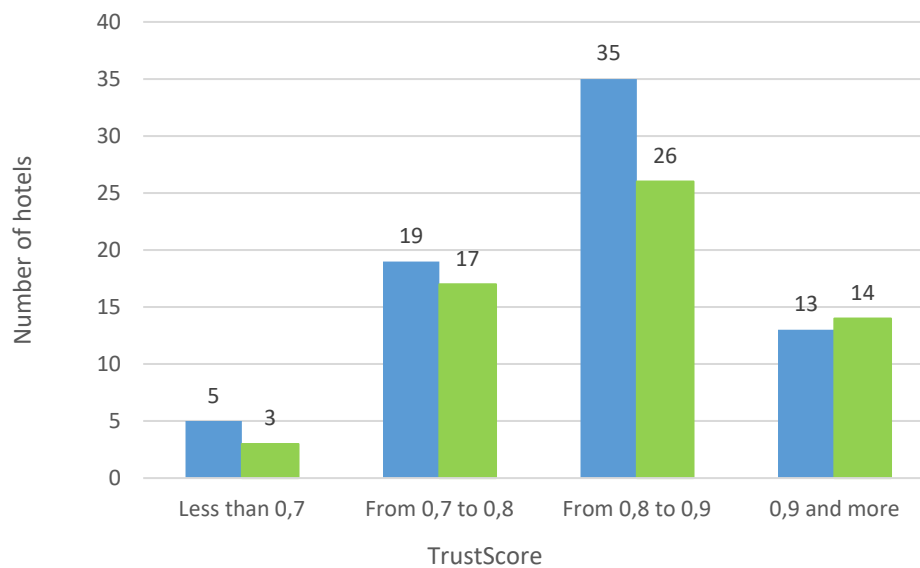
**Table 9 Distribution of hotels analysed on Booking.com (blue) and on TripAdvisor (green)**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 9 highlights the distribution of hotels (it includes hotels that answered to comments and those who did not) in relation to the score they received on TrustYou. There are a total of 144 hotels for Booking.com and 147 hotels for TripAdvisor. The total number of hotel for each review websites has been used to calculate the rate of answer.

**Table 10 Proportion of hotels on Booking.com (blue) and TripAdvisor that have answered (green)**



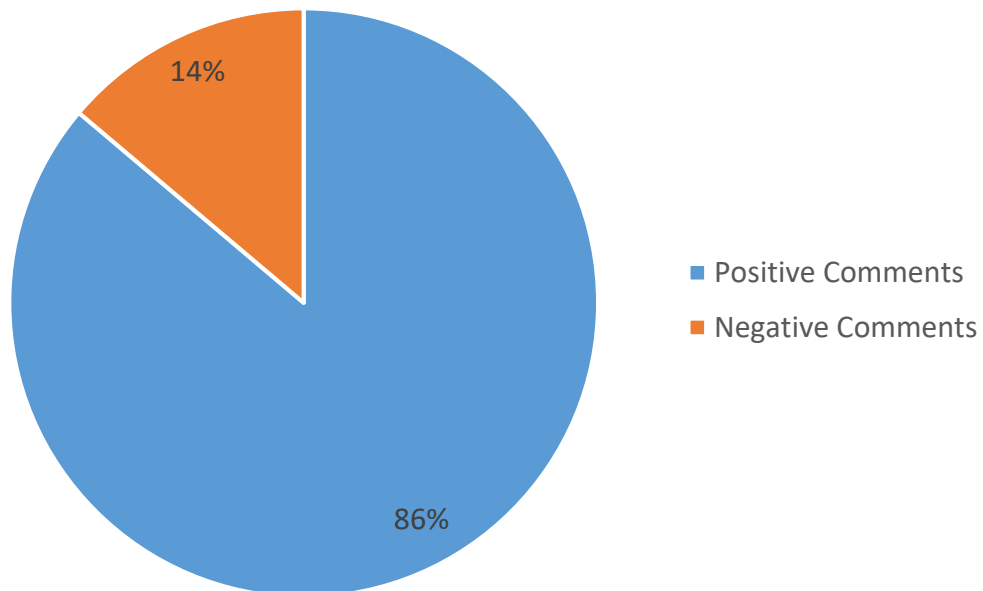
Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 10 shows the proportion of hotels that only have answered to comments according to their score on TrustYou. There is a total of 72 hotels that have answered to comments on Booking.com and 60 hotels on TripAdvisor. Therefore, half of the hotels on Booking.com and 59% of the hotels on TripAdvisor have not responded to any comments. The quality of answer, the speed of answer and the length of answer have been calculated according to those numbers.

#### 4.1.2. POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE COMMENTS

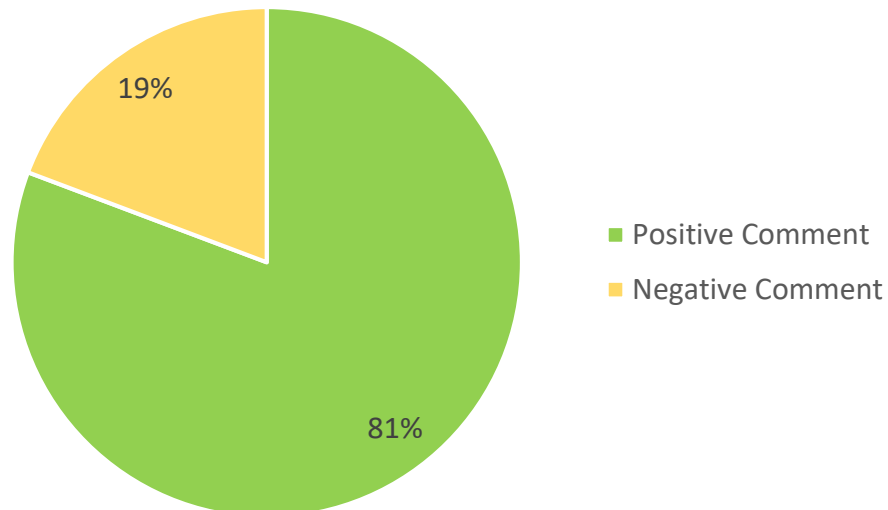
*Booking.com*

**Table 11 Proportion of positive and negative comments on Booking.com**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 11 shows the total number of positive comments versus the negative comments that received an answer from the hotel on Booking.com. Amongst the 72 hotels that have responded to reviews, there are 600 comments answered; of which 517 are positive and 83 are negative. Positive comments represent 86.17% whereas negative comments represent 13.83%.

*TripAdvisor***Table 12 Proportion of positive and negative comments on TripAdvisor**

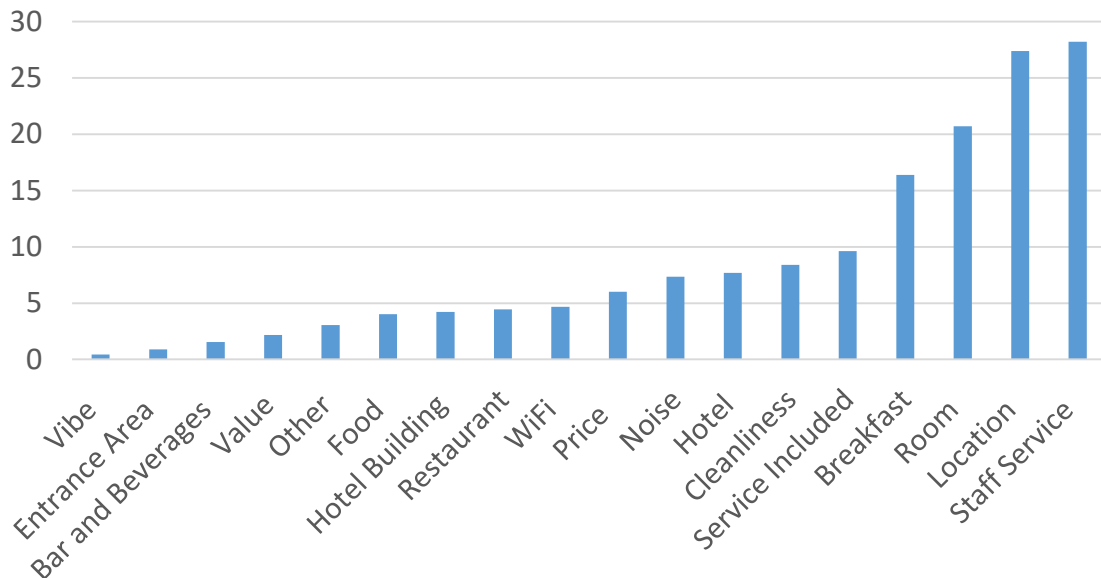
Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 12 shows the proportion of positive and negative feedbacks that received an answer from the hotel on TripAdvisor. Amongst the 60 hotels analysed, there are 462 comments answered; of which 373 are positive and 89 are negative. Positive comments represent 80.74% and negative comments 19.26%.

#### 4.1.3. SENSIBLE SECTORS ACCORDING TO CUSTOMERS

*Booking.com*

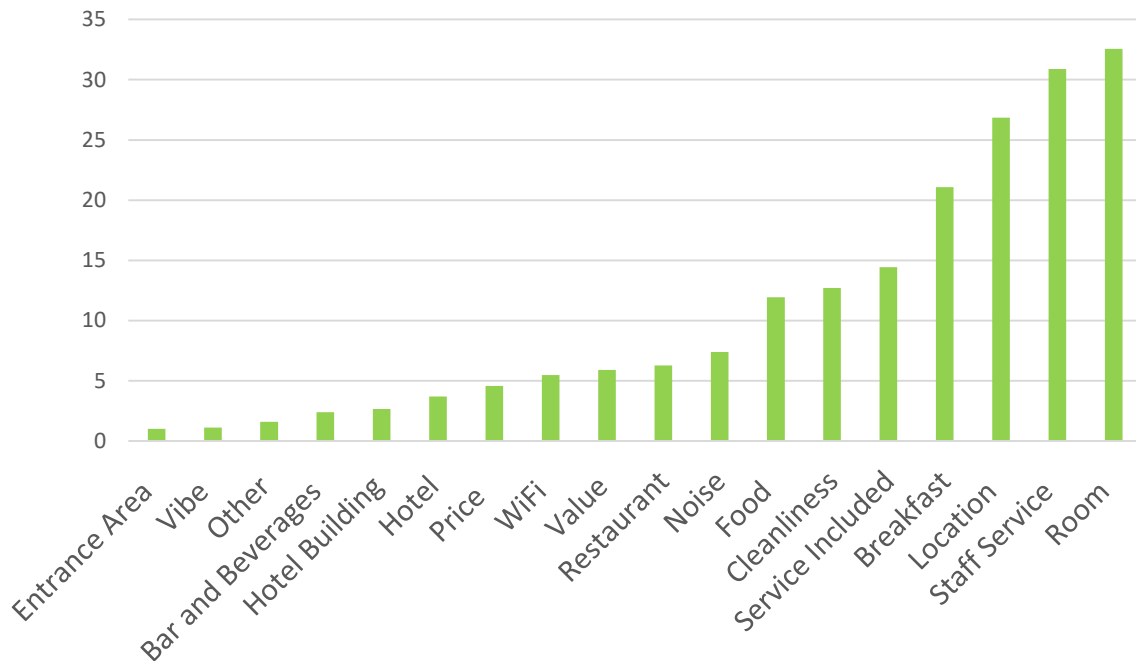
**Table 13 The most sensible sectors according to customers on Booking.com**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 13 shows the most sensible sectors clients have criticised (positively and negatively) amongst the comments analysed on Booking.com website. Rooms, the location of the hotel and the quality of staff service are what came out the most in clients' reviews. However, clients are less demanding with the vibe, the entrance area and the bar and beverages in a hotel.

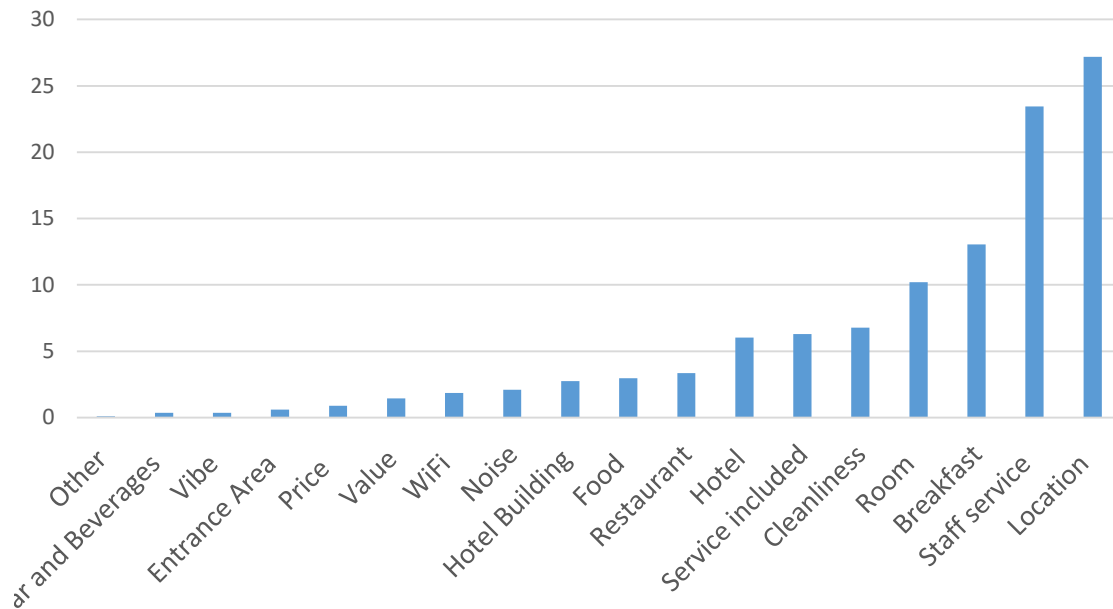


*TripAdvisor***Table 14 The most sensible sectors according to customers on TripAdvisor**

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

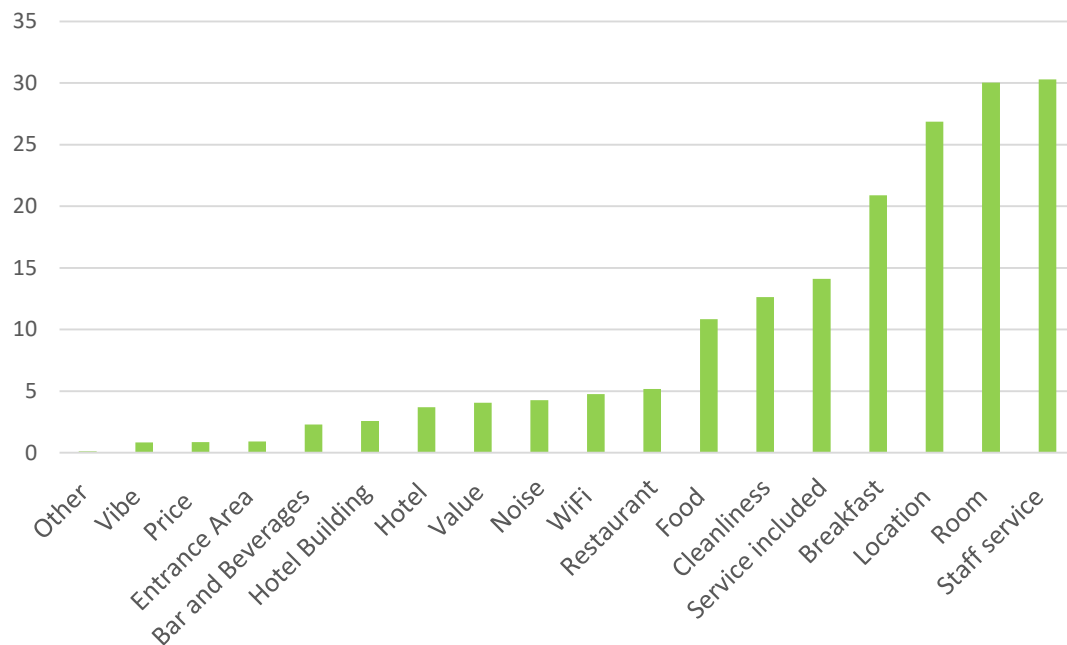
Table 14 shows the most sensible sectors for guests amongst the comments analysed on TripAdvisor website. The results are almost the same comparing to Booking.com. Location, staff service and room are still what clients criticised the most. The entrance area, the vibe and other are where clients are less sensible.

## 4.1.3.1. THE MOST POSITIVELY CRITICISED SECTORS

*Booking.com***Table 15 The most positively criticised sectors from guests on Booking.com**

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

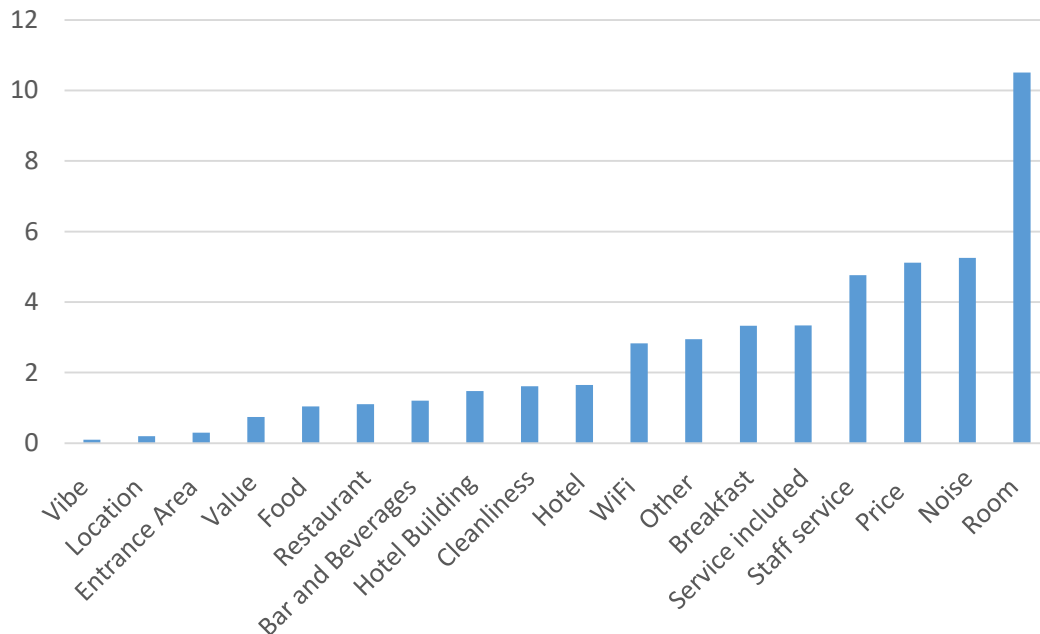
Table 15 shows the sectors that have been the most positively criticised by guests amongst the comments analysed on Booking.com. The breakfast, the quality of the staff service and the location are the sectors that have been the most positively criticised.

*TripAdvisor***Table 16 The most positively criticised sectors from guests on TripAdvisor**

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

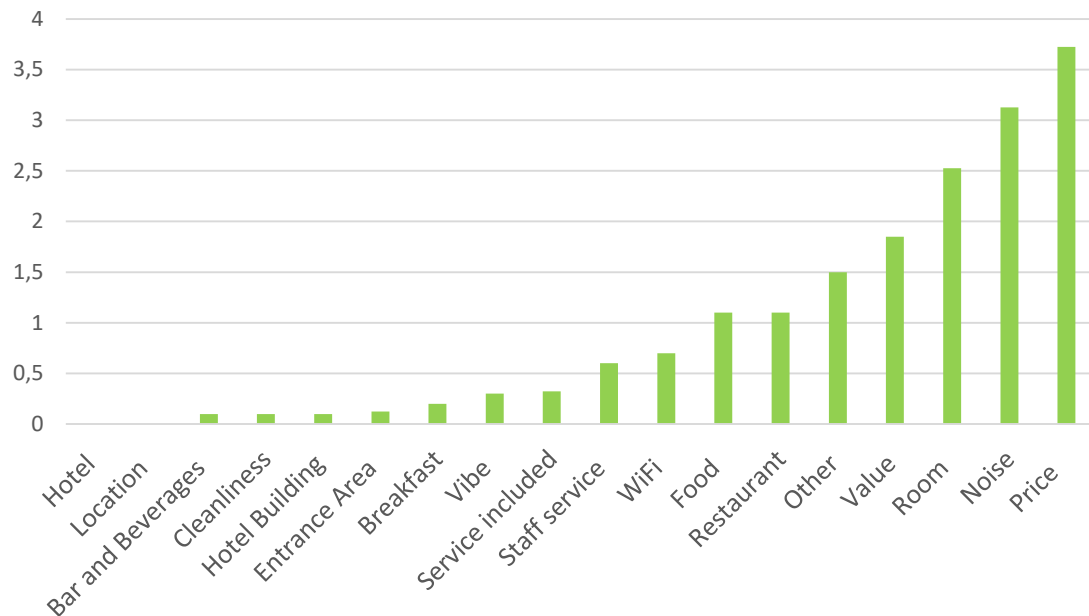
Table 16 shows the sectors that have been the most positively criticised by guests amongst the comments analysed on TripAdvisor. The location of hotels, the rooms and the quality of the staff service are those that have been the most positively criticised.

## 4.1.3.2. THE MOST NEGATIVELY CRITICISED SECTORS

*Booking.com***Table 17 The most negatively criticised sectors from guests on Booking.com**

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 17 shows the sectors that have been the most negatively criticised by guests amongst the comments analysed on Booking.com. Price, noise and room are the sectors that have been the most negatively criticised. We can see that rooms come out more frequently on negative comments than the other sectors.

*TripAdvisor***Table 18 The most negatively criticised sectors from guests on TripAdvisor**

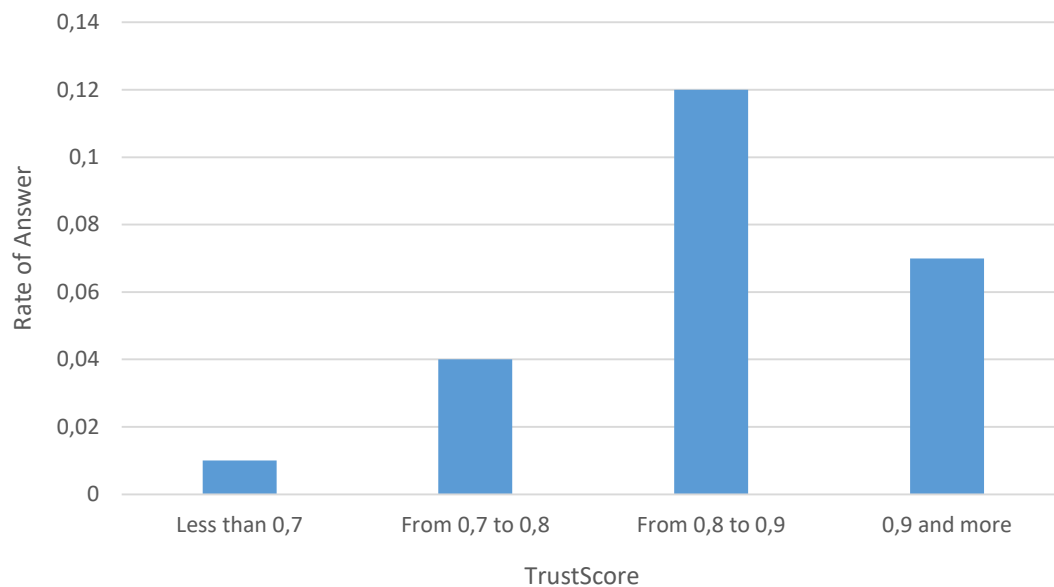
Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 18 shows the sectors that have been the most negatively criticised by guest amongst the comments analysed on TripAdvisor. Room, noise and price are the sectors that have been the most negatively criticised.

#### 4.1.4. RATE OF ANSWER

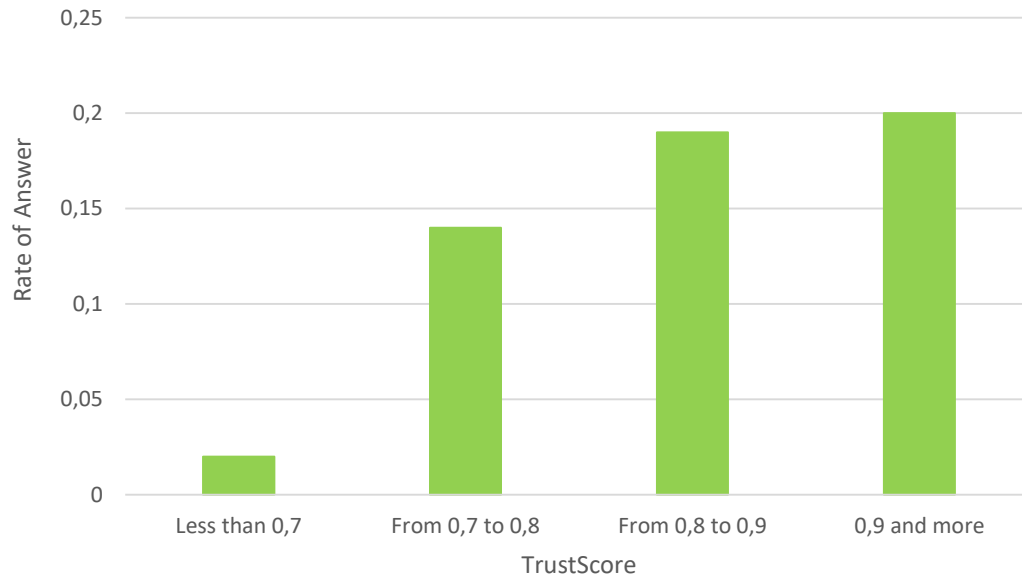
*Booking.com*

**Table 19 Rate of answer on Booking.com**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 19 compares the rate of answer on Booking.com with the hotel score on TrustYou. We can observe that higher is the TrustScore, higher is the rate of answer. However, above 90% the rate of answer decreases.

*TripAdvisor***Table 20 Rate of answer on TripAdvisor**

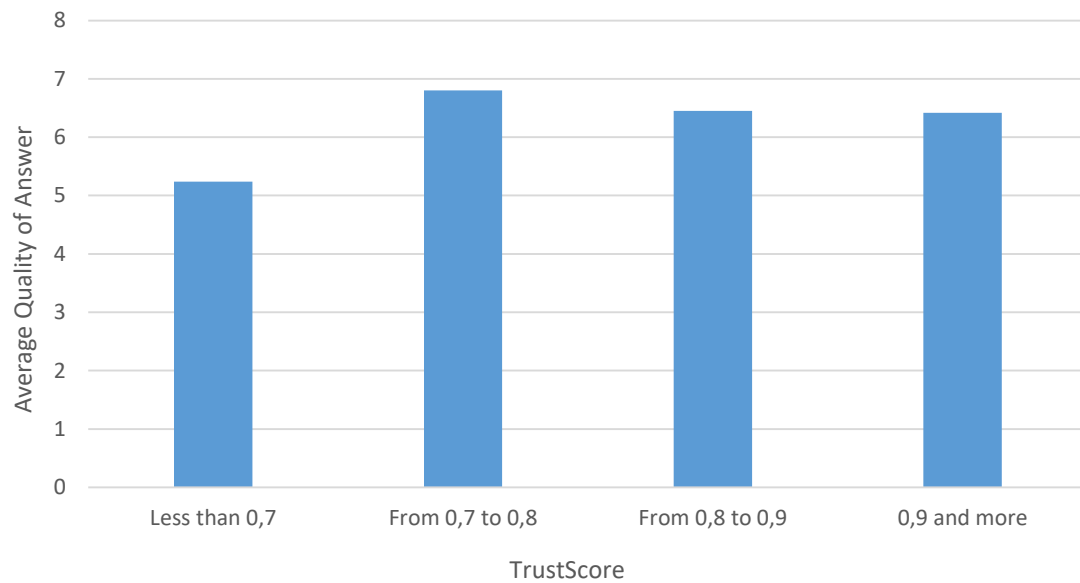
Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 20 shows the rate of answers on TripAdvisor versus their TrustYou score. We can see that higher is the TrustScore, higher is the rate of answer. This tendency is less marked for hotels with a score above 90%.

#### 4.1.5. QUALITY OF ANSWER

*Booking.com*

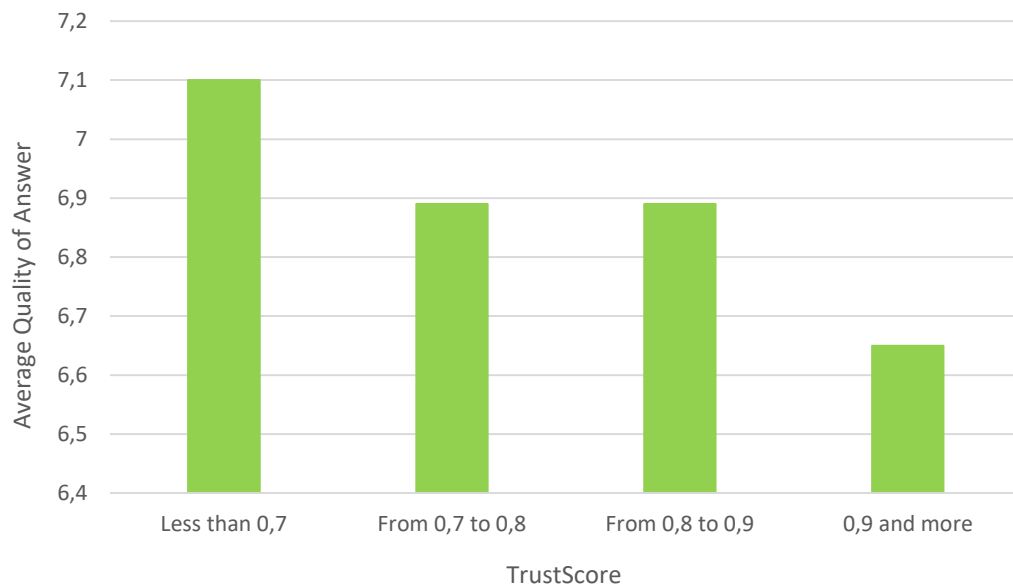
**Table 21 Quality of answer on Booking.com**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 21 shows the average quality of answer analysed on Booking.com compared with the hotel score on TrustYou. There is no clear correlation between the quality of answer and the TrustScore.



*TripAdvisor***Table 22 Quality of answer on TripAdvisor**

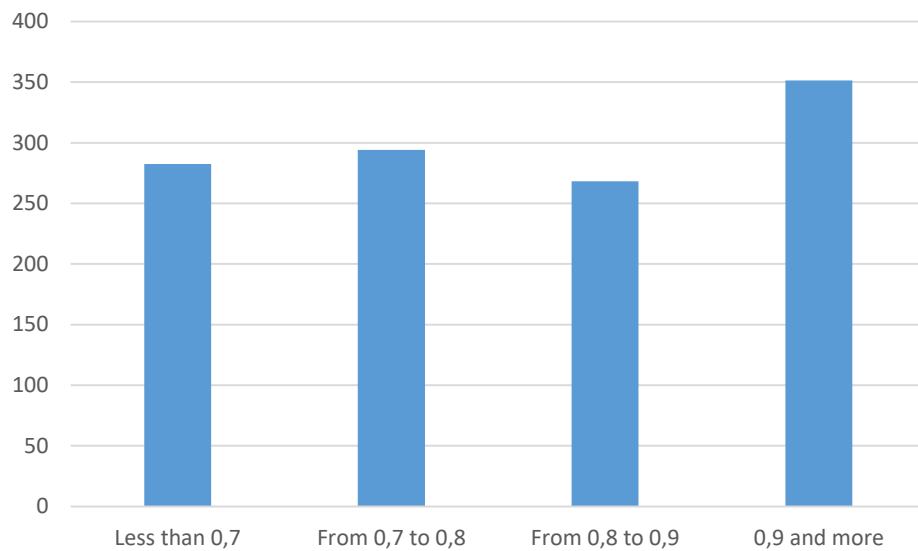
Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 22 demonstrates the average quality of answer analysed on TripAdvisor compared with the hotel score on TrustYou. There is no clear correlation between the quality of answer and the TrustScore. However, we can notice that hotels that have a score below 70%, have a better quality of answer than hotels with a higher score.

#### 4.1.6. LENGTH OF ANSWER

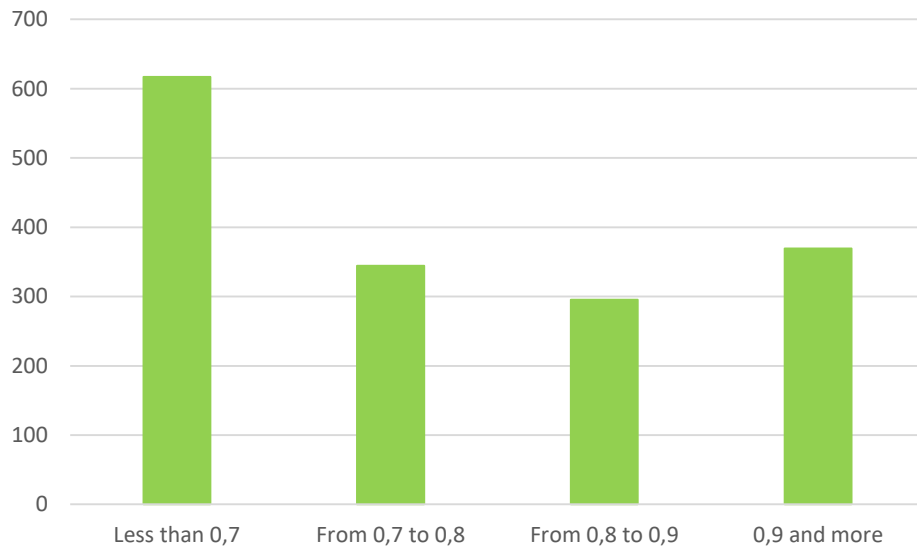
*Booking.com*

**Table 23 Length of answer on Booking.com**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 23 shows the average length of answer on Booking.com compared with the TrustScore. There is no clear correlation between those two parameters.

*TripAdvisor***Table 24 Length of answer on TripAdvisor**

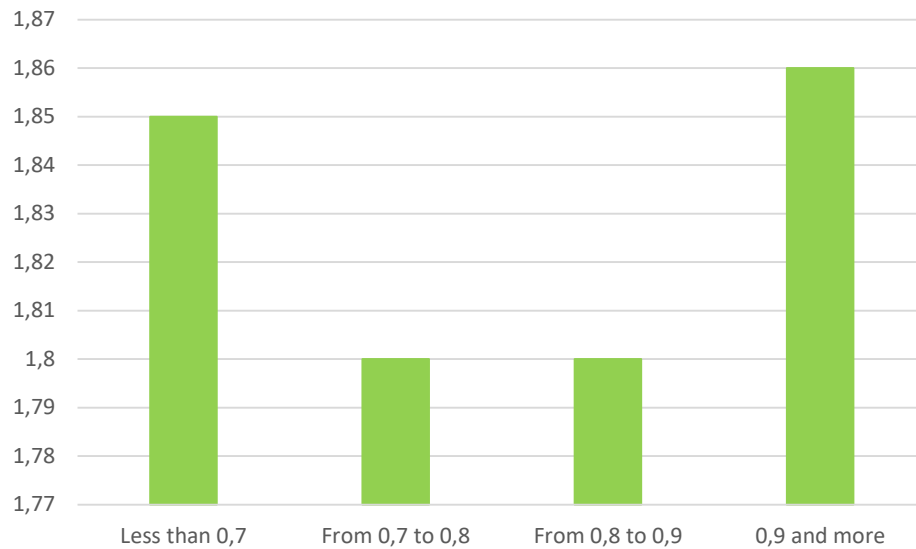
Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Table 24 shows the average length of answer on TripAdvisor compared with hotel scores on TrustYou. There is no clear correlation between those two parameters. However, once again, hotels that have a score below 70%, write longer answer than hotels with a higher score.

#### 4.1.7. SPEED OF ANSWER

*TripAdvisor*

**Table 25 Speed of answer on TripAdvisor**



Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

On table 25 the average speed of answer from TripAdvisor is compared with the TrustYou score. There is a correlation between the two parameters. Hotels with a score below 70% and above 90% answer faster than hotels with a score between 70% and 90%.

## 4.2. INTERVIEWS

Three hotel managers have been interviewed in order to have an insight of online reviews management practices. The first hotelier is Daniel Rousseau (human resources manager and quality coach of the hotel Beaulac\*\*\*\* in Neuchâtel), then Eric Fassbind (owner of “By Fassbind Hotels” chain) and the last but not least, Ariane Boesch (manager of the Hôtel des Arts\*\*\* in Neuchâtel).

### *Importance of review websites*

Before going further, the first thing that the three interviewees pointed out is the difference between TripAdvisor and Booking.com. On TripAdvisor anybody can write a comment, even though the user has not been to the hotel. On Booking.com, the user has to stay in the hotel to be able to write a comment. Even if the client cancelled the room, she or he cannot write a comment on Booking.com. Therefore, on TripAdvisor comments have more probabilities to be fraudulent and not representative.

According to Mr. Rousseau (2016) from the hotel Beaulac, it is vital and a necessity for hoteliers to work with those review websites. Even though many rooms are booked through companies for business purpose, leisure travellers occupy the rooms left based on the comments they have read online. Those websites are essential since they are the most used tools to make reservations. Mr. Fassbind (2016) finds that it is a new way of receiving a maximum of different point of views. It gives also customers more information on their expectations once arrived at the destination.

### *Opportunities & constraints*

There are several opportunities for hoteliers to be present on those websites. One is the visibility. Booking.com pays a lot to be the first on research pages on the Internet. For a small hotel such as the Hotel des Arts, it gives more visibility worldwide. Everybody who has access to the Internet can see the hotel online. Ever since more and more people consider those review websites in their decision-making process, Mrs. Boesch (2016) has increased her occupancy rate and her turnover by 10-15%. Besides, now that revenue management is used by most hoteliers, it gives them a powerful strategy to use online reputation at their advantage. Indeed, now reputation pricing has become the new trend for managers. It gives

graphical tools that help hoteliers visualise their market position in relation to their rate and reputation and setting new pricing opportunities (Grier, 2016).

However, all of this has a cost and commissions are no exception. 12% to 15% of commission on Booking.com on each reservation is something not to underestimate. There is also additional costs for hotels where competition is more present, to have a good place on Booking.com the commission double and without forgetting the possibility to pay to appear in the first page on Google. Moreover, according to Mrs. Boesch, hoteliers do not have as much power on prices as before. Indeed, according to an article published on L'Express of Neuchâtel (Gigon, 2016), platforms such as Booking.com have a tariff clause that prevent hoteliers to offer cheaper prices to their clients, but this is going to change.

Mr. Rousseau has also experienced the fact that during the renovation of the hotel, it happened that they offer discount because of the noise pollution. However, few clients before having seen their room, were trying to negotiate rates, because they read a comment about the discount. Or simply, some were negotiating rates in exchange of a good comment online.

According to Mr. Fassbind those practices were previously integrated in the customs of the hotel chain. Guest feedbacks were already taken into account. Therefore, it has not brought him any opportunities neither any constraints.

### *Comments management*

How do you manage online comments?

The three managers interviewed take into consideration online comments. For Mr. Rousseau all comments are taken into account, not only guest comments (comments made in room directly thanks to a form) but also all online reviews (Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and other websites) and remarks made directly to employees. It gives him an insight of all complaints and helps him to find the source of the problem. Since all information is computerized and stored per client, he can anticipate problems. For example, a person that comes regularly at the hotel and was not happy with the cleanliness of the room last time she/he stayed, will allow to be more careful on this problem next time the client come. This can help making the difference with other competitors and showing to clients that they are important for the hotel.

Mrs. Boesch analyses guest comments with graphs, but does not store them per client. She takes directly into consideration feedbacks made by clients and correct them as soon as possible. It is easier to manage comments made in the hotels than on online.

Mr. Fassbind goes in the same direction as Mrs. Boesch. He does not store comments but makes a list of critics that come out often to find a solution. After all, comments are almost all the same since each hotel has its own strengths and weaknesses. He takes more advantage of guest comments; it is a more personal and direct way to write something person to person. Finally, as he said, it is true that not everybody likes to put her or his name on the Internet, still many people write to Mr. Fassbind by email or mail.

### *Answering comments*

All three answers to comments. Mrs. Boesch gives the responsibility of answering to comments to one of her receptionist. The person in charge is answering once per week to a maximum of comments, positive and negative, on Booking.com. The objective is not to write always the same answer, so that the message feels more personal.

Mr. Fassbind has also in each hotel a receptionist who takes care of comments. On a monthly basis they have a look at what happened during the period. Here, the objective is not to write too long answers to avoid formalities as business correspondence. Answering to all comments is not a necessity; it varies case by case. The importance is to know where the hotels positions itself and to know what people think about it. As he said, if employees can answer, it is a “nice-to-have”.

In the hotel Beaulac, the quality manager, the sales manager and sometimes the general director are in charge of answering to comments. Here, they do not answer systematically to all reviews. If the client waits for an answer or the hotel is questioned of course they will answer. Moreover, if the comment is not representative or shows only one side of the story, the people in charge of answering will gently telling the missing part. If the guests complaint about something not directly link with the hotel, than there is no necessity to answer.

### *Challenge*

What are the challenges to be present on those online review websites?

The main challenge for the three interviewees is to answer the fastest as possible. As Mr. Rousseau said, when a client is unhappy or wait for a gesture from the hotel, the hotelier cannot wait four days before positioning himself. Besides, if there is something to rectify in the hotel, it is better to change it directly. Mrs. Boesch pointed out also another challenge. They try to boost clients to book through the hotel directly and not via Booking.com in order to avoid paying commissions.

### *Strategy*

The strategy of Mr. Fassbind is taking long-term actions. Each six months, he has a look at the score in the different online review websites and pays attention to comments that come out most often to improve the hotel. Renovation has the biggest impact on the score. Indeed, new rooms are much more appreciated than older ones. Every 10 or 15 years, Mr. Fassbind makes renovations so that it improves guests' satisfaction.

Because Hotel Beaulac is a member of Best Western, Mr. Rousseau and his co-workers have access to Medallia: A website that collect comments written on online review websites. It allows hotels to compare the hotel's performance within the brand and to identify opportunities for maintenance or improvements (Medallia, 2016). Thanks to that, Mr. Rousseau can have a global insight of guests' satisfaction, know the position of the hotel in customers' mind and find recurrent problems.

Mrs. Boesch has another strategy in addition to analysing comments. Not only she encourages guests to book via their own services, but also when possible, she upgrades clients who reserved a small room. It has been a year now and it finally pays off. With around 800 comments on Booking.com, it is quite hard to increase the score. However, the hotel has finally reached a score of eight, which is rated as "very good" on Booking.com. Moreover, she and her co-workers do not hesitate to boost clients to write a nice comment about their upgrade. This practice confirm a recent study conducted by TSA Solutions, Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts and Brand Karma. They have found that implementing upselling strategy at the front



desk, increase the number of bookings and the online reputation by 25%. This is a proactive approach to ensure that clients' expectations are satisfied or even exceeded (Kohlmayr, 2014).

### *Changes made thanks to comments*

Mr. Fassbind has made a great use of comments to make some renovations. For example, he decided to rebuild the facade of the Hotel Alpha-Palmiers because of noise pollution that many people complained about. Regularly he takes into consideration comments to make changes.

Mrs. Boesch takes also comments as an opportunity to improve her hotel. For example, as many people complained about the expensiveness of the breakfast, she and her team decided to increase the choice of food for their guests such as salmon, eggs and crepes. However, the hotel does not consider all reviews such as the noise. Knowing that it is located in the centre of Neuchâtel, it is hard to avoid it.

Finally, Mr. Rousseau as well consider reviews to improve the product, it is important for the hotel's fate. He pointed out also another interesting point. There is also another parameter to take into account. Since 70% are business clients, these people travel a lot. Therefore, they will receive a lot of forms to rate the service they used. They cannot and, above all, are not interested to fill in all the forms. Such clients will write a comment only if the hotel exceeded her or his expectation or, on the contrary, if the consumer had a very bad experience. So, it is not representative to make an analysis about which comments are positive and negative. However, what is important is to solve the problem that the client pointed out in the review.

### *Results*

Does those efforts pay off?

According to Mr. Fassbind, not necessarily or slightly. As he said, only the way has changed, it is not something new. Guest feedbacks were already introduced a long time ago. Also, it is quite hard to improve the online score when there are many comments, except when the hotel is renovated. It takes time!

It has been a year now, that Mrs. Boesch has begun her upgrade strategy. And she sees the results now. Another point that Mr. Rousseau pointed out is that it gives also an additional motivation to employees. Since comments are made public and the reputation of the hotel is at stake, employees want to do their best to improve the score of the hotel.

### *Future*

According to Mr. Rousseau, those websites will remain essential for hoteliers. However, there should be a stronger follow-up on comments. Generally, fraudulent comments can easily be noticed, but there are still too many non-representative reviews that should not be accepted. Also, anonymous comments should not be accepted at all, because it does not allow the hotel to improve the service, as it is not possible to know who wrote the review and, therefore, find the room she/he stayed in. The main aim of a comment is to be constructive.

For Mrs. Boesch, hoteliers now have a knife to their throat. Fortunately, in Neuchâtel it is a relative small destination and there is not as much as competition as in big cities such as in Paris or Barcelona. Those hotels have to pay many commissions (up to 25% in Barcelona), to be the first ones on Google search pages and some even pay to have symbols such as the thumb-up on their website. They do not have the choice and are under pressure, because if they refuse to work with Booking.com for example, their occupancy rate will decrease. In the future, she and Mr. Fassbind as well think that hotels will depend more and more on companies that offer package services such as Customer Alliance or TrustYou. They collect all comments from all platforms such as Booking.com and TripAdvisor and show hotels graphs and statistics to help the business improve. However, this will lead to more costs. Finally, according to Mr. Fassbind, there will only be online comments and it will be easier to handle as well.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE COMMENTS

On Booking.com and TripAdvisor hotels tend to answer more to positive comments than negative ones. PwC found the same tendency which is described on page 15 in this paper.

The reason might be that those hotels have a larger proportion of positive comments than negative ones. Therefore, the person in charge of online reputation management will tend to answer more to positive reviews than to negative ones.

Another reason might be that some negative feedbacks might not be useful, neither for the hotel nor for other users who are reading reviews. Thus, for businesses there is no reason to answer them. Some hotels prefer also contacting the person in private when the client had a bad experience to have a deeper understanding of what happened. Thus, if the hotel has contacted the guest in private, potential clients cannot see the answer on the review website.

However, if hotels answer to a bigger proportion of positive comments, guests might have a bad feeling about the hotel. Indeed, customers might have the impression that the hotel does not take into consideration negative reviews because they do not see any answer from the hotel, even though it might be incorrect.

### 5.2. SENSIBLE SECTORS FOR CUSTOMERS

The most sensible sectors according to customers are rooms, location and the quality of the staff service. Those three criteria came out the most on comments answered on Booking.com and TripAdvisor no matter whether the comment was negative or positive.

Room is the main product the hotel offers. It is the main reason why a client comes to a hotel. It is on the room that the expectation of the client are the most sensible. Therefore, hoteliers should pay attention to the comfort of their rooms and make renovation if necessary.

Clients choose a hotel according to what they will do during their stay and, thus, the location of the hotel is an important criterion. Hotels should enhance their location so that clients have an additional reason to book the hotel.

Finally, the quality of the staff service is a factor that guests are very sensible. Even though the location or the room are very good, the quality of the service can have a bad influence on the score. For example, employees at the front desk are the first contact customers have when entering the hotel and the last one when checking out. It is the last memory they have. Therefore, making sure that the service is good is an important factor.

#### 5.2.1. THE MOST POSITIVELY CRITICISED SECTORS

The most positively criticised sectors by guests on Booking.com are the breakfast, the quality of the staff service and the location. On TripAdvisor the same tendency is noticeable. The location, the rooms and the quality of the staff service were criticised the most.

Breakfast is the first thing that most of the guests enjoy when waking up in the morning. Therefore, it is an important factor as well. The quality and the diversity of the food are what clients expect for a breakfast.

The quality of the staff service is linked with all the main departments of a hotel: Housekeeping, the reception, and the restauration (for breakfast, lunch and dinner). Therefore, as mentioned before, if the service is poor, it can lead to a bad online score, because to be well treated is something that guests love.

When preparing a trip, the location of the hotel is essential. If it is not well located, guests might not book a room. Therefore, if the trip is well prepared, the location can only be positively criticised.

Finally, the rooms are one of the most sensible factors according to the comments analysed. Rooms are where the main expectations of guests are. So, if their expectations are fully satisfied, they are more likely to leave a comment, as well as, if their expectations are not fulfilled at all.

### 5.2.2. THE MOST NEGATIVELY CRITICISED SECTORS

On both review websites, the rooms, the noise and the price were the most negatively criticised sectors by guests. On Booking.com rooms are a bit over represented than the other sectors.

We can notice that the rooms are criticised both negatively and positively. As mentioned before it is the main reason why guests make reservations, therefore, if the hotel has exceeded or failed expectations of their guests, there is more chance that they will leave a comment.

Regarding the noise, as guests go to a hotel mainly to sleep and to have a peaceful place to work, the noise is, in this case, a very important factor. Unfortunately, as some hotels are located in cities, the noise is unavoidable and, in most of the cases, hotels cannot do anything to solve this problem, except upgrading the guest or renovating the building.

Price is a sensitive factor. It is often compared with the quality of the stay, whether it was worth it or not. The study made by PwC noticed that the more guests spend according to the type of the hotel they have chosen, the more they expect for their money.

### 5.3. RATE OF ANSWER

There is a correlation between the TrustScore and the rate of answer. Higher is the TrustScore, higher is the rate of answer. It means that hotels that have a better score are those who answer more often. However, on Booking.com this tendency decreases with a score above 90%. This tendency is also found on the study made by PwC. Four-star hotels answer more frequently than three-star hotels.

One of the explanation is that a hotel that has a good online score is more worried about the well-being of their clients. Therefore, there is more chance that the hotel answers to comments. Moreover, hotels tend to answer more frequently on TripAdvisor than on Booking.com. One of the reasons might be because on TripAdvisor, the fact that everybody can write a comment increases the risk that the hotel has non-representative reviews.

Now the questions is: "Does the answer of a hotel have an impact on the online mark?" A priori, it does not have any influence because the client decides the score of the hotel before that the hotel can answer. However, hotels that answer to comment show to potential

customers that they take into consideration critics. A hotel that is worried about what their clients think about them, will know what their strengths and weaknesses are. Therefore, the business will strengthen and improve itself and, consequently, it will give a better image of the hotel for potential clients. Therefore, we can see that a hotel that answers to comments tend to have a better score in the reviews in the long-term.

Furthermore, the perception of the guests might change according to the hotel's answers. Indeed, seeing the good rank of the hotel and its interest by responding to reviews might increase the confidence the client can have regarding the hotel. Indeed, it shows that the hotelier is managing well her or his business. Therefore, the client may tend to book more easily this kind of hotel. The rate of answer of the hotel reflects how the establishment is concerned about their clients' satisfaction.

For future studies, it might be interesting to analyse the influence on the confidence a user has in a hotel that is very present online and whether it influences potential clients to book this hotel. Furthermore, analysing the impact each answers has on consumers would bring interesting results. Indeed, researchers will be able to examine the client's perception after she/he has read the answer of the hotel.

#### 5.4. QUALITY OF ANSWER

There is no general correlation found between the quality of answer and the TrustScore. Therefore, a priori on Booking.com, no matter how the answer is structured, it will not have an impact on the final score. Moreover, regardless the score of the hotel, on Booking.com the quality of answer is the same towards guests.

However, on TripAdvisor, we can see that hotels with a lower score tend to have a better quality of answer than well-ranked hotel. One of the reason might be that they want to show a higher quality of answer towards guests that have criticised negatively and/or positively the hotel.

### 5.5. LENGTH OF ANSWER

There is no general correlation found between the length of answer and the TrustScore. Therefore, a priori on Booking.com, the length of the answer does not have any impact on the online score of the hotel. Moreover, the length of answer is the same towards clients regardless the score of the hotel.

However, on TripAdvisor, poorly-rated hotels tend to write longer answers than well-rated hotels. This reason might be explained because, hotels that do not have good scores, have more negative comments and therefore, have to write longer responses to justify themselves.

### 5.6. SPEED OF ANSWER

There is a correlation found between the speed of answer and the TrustScore on TripAdvisor. It seems that hotels that answer the fastest are either the poorly-rated (less than 70%) ones or the very-well-rated ones (90% and more). One of the reason is that, as said before, the one with a high score are more concerned about their online reputation. Therefore, they are more present online and they answer faster than the other.

Regarding the poorly-rated hotels, they might want to answer fast because, as they have more negative comments, they want to explain or justify what happened as fast as possible. Indeed, the faster the answer, less users will see the negative review of the client and more will be able to read the explanation of the hotel.

In regard to hotels that have a score between 70% and 90%, they might be less present online and, therefore, they answer slower as the others.

### 5.7. INTERVIEWS

Mrs. Boesch is very present on Booking.com. She answers to every comments, positive or negative, but she does not store them. Her strategy is to upgrading guests and encouraging them to write an online comment. It pays off on the long term.

Mr. Rousseau does not necessarily answer to all comments. If the comment lacks details or is not representative, he will answer. His strategy is to store comments to anticipate problems and, therefore, he will know where he has to be careful for the next stay of the client.

Mr. Fassbind has a long-term strategy. Every six months, he analyses reviews and sees what critics came out most frequently. His strategy is to make changes on the long term because he noticed that renovations have the biggest impact on the score.

As seen in the practice of the different hoteliers interviewed, each of them have their own way of managing their online reputation. Having a strategy to answer comments might have a positive impact on a long-term. A study from the Cornell University demonstrates that the majority of visits on websites such as TripAdvisor are made within the final days of reservation decision. Therefore, a positive online presence should be a priority for hoteliers (Kohlmayr, 2014). Indeed, online review websites play a big role in the decision-making process of customers (Blal & Sturman, 2014).

After the analysis, the three hoteliers have been contacted in order to know whether they will change their online reputation practices. All three already knew this fact. Furthermore, they do not answer to comments to have a better score, but it is their duty to take into consideration online reviews and take action accordingly. Mr. Rousseau pointed out also that answering to feedbacks online is not necessarily the most adapted solution, however, a more personalized response such as an email or a phone call is sometimes better.

We can see that the practices of the three hoteliers interviewed are the same than suggestions described on page 12, which are: encouraging guests to write online feedbacks, responding to comments in an appropriate and professional manner, taking action according to guests' review, knowing the different review websites, learning how to take advantage of those websites and answering fast.

## 5.8. ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first question was whether hoteliers respond to customer feedbacks on review websites. The majority of hotels analysed do not respond to comments. 50% of hotels on Booking.com and 59% of hotels on TripAdvisor have not answered to any comments. A reason might be that some hotels do not use Booking.com and TripAdvisor to manage their online reputation but other review websites. Another reason might be that they have another way of managing their reputation, meaning that they contact their guests personally, for example, by email, mail or telephone. Alternatively, some hotels might not have implemented review websites in their reputation management yet.



The second question was whether Swiss hotels are managing online reviews. It is a broad question because “managing” can include many things. It is difficult to answer quantitatively to this question. Regarding the hoteliers interviewed, all of them are considering the critics made by clients. They regularly have a look at the online comments about their hotel, they answer to reviews if necessary, they give the responsibility to an employee to answer them, they look at what are their weaknesses and what actions they can undertake to improve. For the moment, however, they do not use a special tool such as TrustYou to analyse their online reputation.

The third question was regarding the type of comments hotels tend to answer. Amongst the hotel analysed there is a general tendency. Apparently, positive comments are the most answered ones. One explanation can be that in case of bad reviews, managers prefer to contact the guest in private to understand what happen better. On the other hand, another possibility is that some negative reviews are simply not representative or fake. Therefore, managers do not consider them worth answering.

The fourth question was about how hoteliers manage the pressure of negative reviews. It is hard to answer in a quantitative way. However, according to the analysis made, bad-rated hotels (less than 70%) tend to answer faster than hotels that have a score between 70% and 90%. This result does not include the type of comments (positive or negative) hoteliers have answered. Nevertheless, it gives an idea of the way poorly-rated hotels react to their online reputation. According to the three interviews, negative reviews are good as long as they are representative and constructive. It allows them to find the source of the problem, to take actions accordingly and to improve their services or products. Moreover, a negative comment will not have a direct impact on the online ranking of the hotel, if it has many reviews on the review website. Therefore, negative comments are not the main pressure hoteliers are dealing with.

Finally, the last question was whether hotels that answer to customer reviews are better rated than hotels that do not answer to any comment. As regards to what has been found in the analysis, hotels that answer to comments show to potential customers that they take into consideration critics. Therefore, the business will strengthen and improve itself and, consequently, it will give a better image of the hotel for potential clients. Indeed, it shows that the hotel is concerned about the well-being of their clients and that it takes into consideration

critics. We can see that a hotel that answers to comments tend to have a better online reputation in the long-term.

## 5.9. LIMITATIONS

This study has a number of limitations. First of all, the research is based on a sample of hotels located in Switzerland. Therefore, the same research might present different results according to different countries and cultures. Then, the data collected has been compared with TrustYou score, but there are other tools to manage online reputation. Thus, the same analysis might give different results with another tool than TrustYou. Third, the study has analysed 144 hotels on Booking.com and 147 hotels on TripAdvisor, however, not all of them answer to comments. Further researches should focus more specifically on hotels that respond to comments. This will allow getting results that are more precise.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to have a deeper understanding of how online reviews are managed by Swiss hotels.

This paper shows four important points for hotels.

1. The most sensible sectors for guests are the rooms, the location and the quality of the staff service.
2. The four sectors that are the most positively criticised on both review websites are the breakfast, the quality of the staff service, the location and the rooms.
3. The sectors that are the most negatively criticised on both review websites are the rooms, the noise and the price.
4. The rate of answer has an influence on the online score of the hotel. By answering to comments hotels will know their strengths and weaknesses, and therefore, will strengthen or improve itself. Consequently, it will give a better image of the hotel for potential clients.
5. The lowest- and the highest-rated hotels tend to answer faster than hotels that have a medium score.
6. Hotels tend to answer more to positive comments than negative ones.

There are many tips and tricks to manage online reputation. No matter what is the strategy, the most important thing is that guests should feel special and important for the hotel. Their perception of the establishment should be the main concern. Each client is different. The key is to know guests' needs the best as possible to know what their expectations are. As Chris Regalado said, understanding why a consumer makes a purchase will allow businesses to create more personalized and targeted products for customers.

“Get closer than ever to your customers. So close that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves” (Steve Jobs, s.d.)

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, C. (2012). *The Impact of Social Media on Lodging Performance*. New York: Cornell University School of Hotel Administration.
- Anderson, C. K., & Han, S. (2016). *Hotel Performance Impact of Socially Engaging with Consumers*. New York: Cornell University School of Hotel Administration.
- Blal, I., & Sturman, M. (2014). The Differential Effects of the Quality and Quantity of Online Reviews on Hotel Room Sales. *Sage journals*.
- Boesch, A. (2016, October 13). Online Reputation Management. (G. Robbiani, Interviewer)
- Booking.com. (n.d.). *About Booking.com*. Retrieved from Booking.com: <http://www.booking.com/content/about.en-gb.html>
- Buhalis, D., & Mamalakis, E. (2015). *Social Media Return on Investment and Performance Evaluation in the Hotel Industry Context*. Bournemouth: Bournemouth University.
- Cantalops, A. S., & Salvi, F. (2014). New consumer behavior: A review of research on eWOM and hotels . *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 41-51.
- Conrady, R. (2014). *Customer Reviews - Reliable for distribution and marketing strategies in the hospitality industry?* Berlin: ITB Berlin.
- Crotts, J. C. (1999). Consumer Decision Making and Prepurchase Information Search. In J. C. Crotts, *Consumer Behavior in Travel and Tourism* (pp. 149-168). Routledge .
- Fassbind, E. (2016, October 10). Online Reputation Management. (G. Robbiani, Interviewer)
- Fotis, J. N. (2015). *The use of social media and its impacts on consumer behaviour: The content of holiday travel*. Bournemouth: Bournemouth University.
- Fox, L. (n.d.). *Just how valuable are online reviews?* Tnooz.
- Gigon, A. (2016). Les réservations des hôtels en ligne prennent l'ascenseur. *L'Express-L'Impartial* , 14.
- Gonzalo, F. (2014, February 18). *De l'influence croissante de TripAdvisor [Infographie]*. Retrieved from Frederic Gonzalo: <http://fredericgonzalo.com/en/>
- Gonzalo, F. (2015, April 29). *When responding to online review, speed matters*. Retrieved from Frederic Gonzalo: <http://fredericgonzalo.com/en/>
- Gretzel, U. (2006). Destination recommendation systems: Behavioral foundations and applications. In Y. G. Hwang, *Information search for travel decisions* (pp. 3-16). Cambridge: CAB International.

- Grier, R. (2016, May 25). *Revenue Management in the Social Digital Age: The Impact of Reviews on Pricing*. Retrieved from 4hoteliers:  
<http://www.4hoteliers.com/features/article/9775>
- Help Scout. (n.d.). *75 Customer Service Facts, Quotes & Statistics*. Retrieved from Helpscout:  
<https://www.helpscout.net/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/>
- Horster, E. (2012). *Reputation und Reiseentscheidung*. Lüneburg: SpringerGabler.
- Kohlmayr, K. (2014, December 16). *Effective Front Desk Upselling Increases Online Reputation by 25%*. Retrieved from Hospitalitynet:  
<http://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/154000320/4068254.html>
- Lenoir, A. (2016, August 1). *PME du tourisme : 4 bonnes pratiques sur les médias sociaux*. Retrieved from Réseau Veille Tourism: <http://veilletourisme.ca/2016/08/01/pme-tourisme-4-bonnes-pratiques-medias-sociaux/>
- Leonardo. (2016, June 22). *3 Content Marketing Trends for Hoteliers*. Retrieved from Blog Leonardo: <http://blog.leonardo.com/3-content-marketing-trends-for-hoteliers/>
- Liechti, X. F. (2015). *L'hôtellerie en Suisse – chiffres et faits*. Retrieved from Hotelleriesuisse:  
[https://www.hotelleriesuisse.ch/files/pdf11/Zahlen\\_und\\_Fakten\\_A6\\_2015\\_fr\\_Web1.pdf](https://www.hotelleriesuisse.ch/files/pdf11/Zahlen_und_Fakten_A6_2015_fr_Web1.pdf)
- Lynn, M., & Riaz, U. (2015). *Thumbs Down...to Thumbs Up*. Accenture.
- Mastroianni, D. (2016, May). *La Confiance, Pilier Fondamental De L'économie Collaborative*. Paris, France.
- Mayer, N. O. (2015). *Online reputations Why hotel reviews matter and how hotels respond*. PwC Switzerland.
- McGuire, K. (2013, July 11). *Price, reviews and ratings: How consumers evaluate a hotel room purchase in a social world*. Retrieved from Tnooz:  
<https://www.tnooz.com/article/price-reviews-and-ratings-how-consumers-evaluate-a-hotel-room-purchase-in-a-social-world/#sthash.mCD2TxgG.dpuf>
- Medallia. (2016). *Medallia*. Retrieved from Medallia:  
<http://www.medallia.com/customer/best-western/>
- Morand, J.-C. (2016, June 15). *Une étude de Cornell démontre à nouveau l'importance de répondre aux avis des consommateurs*. Retrieved from Cyberstrat:  
<http://www.cyberstrat.net/etude-de-cornell-demonstre-a-nouveau-limportance-de-repondre-aux-avis-consommateurs/>
- Mukherjee, A., Liu, B., & Glance, N. (2012). *Spotting Fake Reviewer Groups in Consumer Reviews*. Lyon: International World Wide Web Conference Committee.
- Murphy, C. (2015). *Responding to Online Reviews: A Guide for Hoteliers*. San Francisco: Revinate.

- Observatoire Valaisan du Tourisme. (n.d.). *Vision, mission*. Retrieved from tourobs: <https://www.tourobs.ch/fr/a-propos/missions/>
- Ofcom. (2015). *Media Lives: Wave 10 (2014) and Ten Year retrospective*. London: Ofcom.
- Phillips, P., Zigan, K., Santos Silva, M. M., & Schegg, R. (2015). The interactive effects of online reviews on the determinants of Swiss hotel performance: A neural network analysis. *Tourism Management*, 130-141.
- Poon, A. (1993). *Tourism, technology and competitive strategies*. Wallingford: CAB International.
- Price, S. (2016, May 17). *What's More Important: Social Media Fans or User Generated Content?* Retrieved from Agorapulse : <https://www.agorapulse.com/blog/whats-more-important-social-media-fans-or-user-generated-content>
- Radosevich, L. (1997). *Fixing Web-site Usability*. InfoWorld.
- Ross, E. (2014, November 21). *How to deal with negative TripAdvisor reviews*. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2014/nov/21/how-to-deal-with-negative-tripadvisor-reviews>
- Rousseau, D. (2016, October 10). Online Reputation Management. (G. Robbiani, Interviewer)
- Saul, M. (2016). *The feedback economy*. London: Barclays Corporate.
- Sigmund, H., & Fritsch, A. (2013). *Hotelbewertungen richtig nutzen*. Austria: OHV.
- Sparks, B. A., Fung So, K. K., & Bradley, G. L. (2015). Responding to negative online reviews: The effects of hotel responses on customer inferences of trust and concern. *Tourism Management*, 74-85.
- Statista. (n.d.). *Statistics and Market Data on Social Media & User-Generated Content*. Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/markets/424/topic/540/social-media-user-generated-content/>
- Statistic Brain Research Institute. (2016, August 1). *Facebook Company Statistic*. Retrieved from Statistic Brain: <http://www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics/>
- TendanceHotellerie. (2015, March 4). *L'étude Revinate sur la e-réputation consacre Booking.com en 1er site d'avis*. Retrieved from TendanceHotellerie.fr: <http://www.tendancehotellerie.fr/articles-breves/marketing-distribution/4614-article/l-etude-revinate-sur-la-e-reputation-consacre-booking-com-en-1er-site-d-avis>
- TripAdvisor. (2016). *Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from TripAdvisor: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c4-Fact\\_Sheet.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c4-Fact_Sheet.html)
- TripAdvisor. (2016). *Travel Trends 2016*. TripAdvisor.
- TripAdvisor Inc. (2016). *About TripAdvisor*. Retrieved from TripAdvisor: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c6-About\\_Us.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c6-About_Us.html)

- TrustPilot. (2016). *TrustScore Explained*. Retrieved from support.trustpilot:  
<https://support.trustpilot.com/hc/en-us/articles/201748946-TrustScore-Explained->
- TrustYou. (n.d.). *Overview*. Retrieved from TrustYou: <http://www.trustyou.com/overview/>
- TrustYou. (TrustYou). (2012, 6 July). *Trust-Score-English. (Video)*. Retrieved from  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LcwZ1buQ3Y>
- UNAT. (2014). *Le Tourisme Social et Solitaire & le numérique: Les sites d'avis en ligne*. Paris: UNAT.
- Union des villes suisses. (2014, December 18). *Nouvelle définition du concept de «ville» et de celui d'«agglomération»: l'expression de l'urbanisation*. Retrieved from Union des villes: [http://uniondesvilles.ch/cmsfiles/141218\\_cp\\_agglosuisse.pdf](http://uniondesvilles.ch/cmsfiles/141218_cp_agglosuisse.pdf)
- Valant, J. (2015). *Online consumer reviews: The case of misleading or fake reviews*. N.A.: European Parliamentary Research Service .
- Vardi, G. (2014). *Online Reputation Management for Hotels*. Carmelon Digital Marketing.
- Webrezpro. (2016, March 9). *6 Social Media Recommendations for Independent Hoteliers in 2016*. Retrieved from Webrezpro: <http://www.webrezpro.com/6-social-media-recommendations-independent-hoteliers-2016/>
- Werthner, H., & Klein, S. (1999). *Information Technology and Tourism - A Challenging Relationship*. New York: Springer.
- Whitler, K. A. (2014, July 17). *Why Word Of Mouth Marketing Is The Most Important Social Media*. Retrieved from Forbes:  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kimberlywhitler/2014/07/17/why-word-of-mouth-marketing-is-the-most-important-social-media/2/#450b547b54a9>
- Wilson, T. (2010). *Manage your online reputation* . Self-Counsel Press.
- World Tourism Organization UNWTO. (2016). *Why Tourism*. Retrieved from unwto:  
<http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>

## APPENDIX I: DETAILED GRID

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

			TRIPADVISOR
Category	Criteria	Scales	Comment 1
Comment	Cient's score		
	Date of comment		
	Comment text		
Customer Comment Content	Bar and Beverages	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Breakfast	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Cleanliness	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Entrance Area	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Food	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Grounds	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Hotel Building	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Hotel	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Location	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Menu	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Noise	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Price	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Room	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Service included	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Staff service	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Value	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Vibe	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	WiFi	Yes: 1, No: -1	
	Other	Yes: 1, No: -1	
Total			0



## APPENDIX II: JUDGEMENT OF THE FRIENDLINESS AND THE QUESTIONING OF THE HOTEL

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

#	Comments	Do you consider the comment friendly?			Is the hotel questioning itself?		
		Perso n 1	Perso n 2	Person 3	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3
1	Dear Sir, you are in Geneva. It is the 3rd most expensive city of Europe. Even for basic hotels the minimum price cannot be less than 130 Euros per night. Before giving disappointing and unfair reviews please consider the expensive city that you are visiting. You cannot pay a certain price and have a certain level of service for different countries. We have a good basic service. However it is not possible to pretend to have a certain service with the price standard of your country or european countries. Regards, Staff	0	0	0	0	0	0

## APPENDIX III: MASTER GRID

Source: Data collected by the author (2016)

Characteristics			1
	Name		Trente Trois 33
	Stars		3
	Rooms		39
	Location		City
	TrustYou score		0,63390
	Booking.com score (out of 10)		6,3
	TripAdvisor score (out of 5)		3,5
Booking.com	Rate of answer	Nb of customers' comments since 2013	1720
		Nb of hotel's answers since 2013	207
	Rate of answers		0,120348837
	Positive vs Negative Comment	Positive Comments	3
		Negative Comments	7
	Customer content comments	Bar and Beverages	0
		Bar and Beverages / Nb of comments replied	
		Breakfast	0
		Breakfast/ Nb of comments replied	
		Cleanliness	0
		Cleanliness / Nb of comments replied	
		Entrance Area	0
		Entrance Area / Nb of comments replied	
		Food	0
		Food / Nb of comments replied	
		Hotel Building	-3
		Hotel Building / Nb of comments replied	-0,3
		Hotel	0
		Hotel / Nb of comments replied	
		Location	4
		Location / Nb of comments replied	0,4
		Restaurant	0
		Restaurant / Nb of comments replied	
		Noise	-1
		Noise / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Price	-2
		Price / Nb of comments replied	-0,2
		Room	-1
		Room / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Service included	2
		Service included / Nb of comments replied	0,2
		Staff service	0
		Staff service / Nb of comments replied	
		Value	-1
		Value / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Vibe	0
		Vibe / Nb of comments replied	
		WiFi	0
		WiFi / Nb of comments replied	
		Other	0
		Other / Nb of comments replied	
		Total comment's content	-0,2
		Total comment's content / comment replied	

			1
Booking.com	Quality of answer	Tone of the answer	2
		Focus of the answer	6
		Language	10
		Name of client	0
		Thanked	2
		Rewarded	0
		Wished	0
		Signature from the hotel	8
		Questioning	0
		Mistake	6
		Quality score total	34
		<b>Quality score / answers analysed</b>	<b>3,4</b>
	Length	Length	4199
		<b>Length/ answers analysed</b>	<b>419,9</b>
	Speed	Has the hotel answered within 3 days?	
		Has the hotel answered within 7 days?	
		Has the hotel answered within 28 days?	
		<b>Speed / comments analysed</b>	

TripAdvisor	Rate of answer	Nb of customers' comments since 2013	428
		Nb of hotel's answers since 2013	189
		<b>Rate of answers</b>	<b>0,441588785</b>
	Positive vs Negative	Positive Comment	7
		Negative Comment	3
	Customer content comments	Bar and Beverages	0
		Bar and Beverages / Nb of comments replied	
		Breakfast	5
		Breakfast/ Nb of comments replied	0,5
		Cleanliness	-1
		Cleanliness/ Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Entrance Area	0
		Entrance Area / Nb of comments replied	
		Food	0
		Food / Nb of comments replied	
		Hotel Building	3
		Hotel Building / Nb of comments replied	
		Hotel	0
		Hotel / Nb of comments replied	
		Location	1
		Location / Nb of comments replied	0,1
		Restaurant	0
		Restaurant / Nb of comments replied	
		Noise	0
		Noise / Nb of comments replied	
		Price	0
		Price / Nb of comments replied	
		Room	-3
		Room / Nb of comments replied	-0,3
		Service included	4
		Service included / Nb of comments replied	0,4
		Staff service	2
		Staff service / Nb of comments replied	0,2
		Value	-1
		Value / Nb of comments replied	-0,1
		Vibe	0
		Vibe / Nb of comments replied	
		WiFi	0
		WiFi / Nb of comments replied	
		Other	0
		Other / Nb of comments replied	
		<b>Total comment's content</b>	<b>0,7</b>
		<b>Total comment's content/ comment replied</b>	

TripAdvisor	Quality of answer	Tone of the answer	1
		Focus of the answer	1
		Language	1
		Name of client	0
		Thanked	1
		Rewarded	0
		Wished	0
		Signature from the hotel	0
		Questioning	1
		Mistake	1
		Quality score total	6
		<b>Mean quality score/answer analysed</b>	<b>6</b>
	Length	Length	1100
		<b>Length/ answers analysed</b>	<b>1100</b>
	Speed	Has the hotel answered within 3 days?	0
		Has the hotel answered within 7 days?	1
		Has the hotel answered within 28 days?	1
		Total	2
		<b>Speed/answers analysed</b>	<b>2</b>

## APPENDIX IV: LIST OF HOTELS ANALYSED

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Hotel Löwen                                  | 49. Hotel Piz St. Moritz                          |
| 2. Hotel Central                                | 50. Hôtel De Savoie                               |
| 3. Hotel Seerose                                | 51. Hotel Alpenrose                               |
| 4. Hotel Dependance dell'Angelo                 | 52. Hôtel Restaurant La Croix Verte               |
| 5. Trente Trois 33                              | 53. HELIOPARK Hotels & Alpentherme<br>Leukerbad   |
| 6. Hotel Restaurant Edelweiss                   | 54. Hôtel Castel                                  |
| 7. Luzernerhof                                  | 55. Mercure Plaza Biel                            |
| 8. Hotel Römertor                               | 56. Hotel La Pergola                              |
| 9. Hôtel Diplôme                                | 57. Hôtel Palace                                  |
| 10. MyHotel Merkur Interlaken                   | 58. Hotel Astoria                                 |
| 11. Schweizerhof Hotel                          | 59. Hotel Krebs                                   |
| 12. Hotel Tourist                               | 60. Novotel Bern Expo                             |
| 13. Hotel Metropol                              | 61. Hotel Kreuz Suhr                              |
| 14. Hôtel Villa Toscane                         | 62. Radisson Blu Hotel Lucerne                    |
| 15. Central Continental Hotel                   | 63. Hotel Good Night Inn                          |
| 16. Hotel Restaurant Feld                       | 64. Hotel Banana City                             |
| 17. Hotel Moderne                               | 65. Hotel Arcade                                  |
| 18. Hôtel Calvy                                 | 66. Hotel De La Gare et du Parc                   |
| 19. Hotel Du Lac Wadenswil                      | 67. Bed & Breakfast Oasee                         |
| 20. Hotel Victoria au Lac                       | 68. Hotel Bären am Bundesplatz                    |
| 21. Funny Farm Backpackers                      | 69. Residence Edelweiss Aparthotel                |
| 22. Hotel Landhus                               | 70. Hotel Toscana                                 |
| 23. Grand Hotel Du Parc                         | 71. Swiss Dreams Hotel Gallo                      |
| 24. Hotel Swiss Star Apartments                 | 72. Seehof Hotel du Lac                           |
| 25. Hôtel Club                                  | 73. Swissotel Zürich                              |
| 26. Parkhotel Schwerz                           | 74. Hotel Campofelice                             |
| 27. Touring au Lac                              | 75. Sorell Hotel Sonnentel                        |
| 28. Apartments Swiss Star<br>Universitätstrasse | 76. Hotel Le Lion                                 |
| 29. Hotel Kurhaus Weissenstein                  | 77. Hotel Bellevue am See                         |
| 30. Hotel Romitaggio                            | 78. Albergo Stella                                |
| 31. Hotel City am Bahnhof                       | 79. Strela Hotel                                  |
| 32. Park Hotel du Sauvage                       | 80. Radisson Blu Hotel St. Gallen                 |
| 33. Hotel Metropol                              | 81. Hotel Buchserhof                              |
| 34. Hotel Kreuz                                 | 82. Hotel Robinson                                |
| 35. Hotel Weisses Kreuz GmbH                    | 83. Seehotel Pilatus                              |
| 36. Hôtel Restaurant du Port                    | 84. Club Med Wengen                               |
| 37. Comfort Hotel Royal                         | 85. Apartmenthaus Paradies                        |
| 38. Hotel Restaurant Alex                       | 86. Letzigrund - Apartments                       |
| 39. Hotel Walser                                | 87. Hotel Central                                 |
| 40. Le Montbrillant Hôtel Residence             | 88. Falken Pub & Motel                            |
| 41. Hotel Goldener Schlüssel                    | 89. Hotel Zugertor                                |
| 42. Hotel Acquarello                            | 90. Hotel Kreuz                                   |
| 43. Ramada Hotel Zürich City                    | 91. Minotel Weisses Roessli                       |
| 44. Hotel Sonnentel                             | 92. Hotel Castel Garden / Hotel im<br>Schlosspark |
| 45. Hotel Ambassador                            | 93. HÃ'tel Prealpina                              |
| 46. Hotel Minotel zum roten Lowen               | 94. Hotel Alexander                               |
| 47. Hotel Alfa                                  | 95. Seehotel Schiff                               |
| 48. Hotel Rheinfels                             |   |

96. Wysses Rössli Schwyz	123. Hotel Garni Chasa Castello
97. Zunfthaus zu Wirthen	124. Hotel Altana
98. Hotel Krone	125. Romantik Hotel Schweizerhof
99. Aparthotel Al Lago	Flims
100. Hotel & Restaurant	126. Schweizerhof Swiss Quality
Promenade	Hotel
101. Hotel Schweizerhof	127. Hotel Albergo Miralago
102. Hotel + Restaurant Ochsen	128. Ferienhotel Waldhaus
Lenzburg	129. Posthotel Rössli
103. Aparthotel Rotkreuz	130. Hotel Garni Ca Vegia
104. Hotel Landgasthof Schönbühl	131. L'Étable
105. Hotel Amaris	132. Grischa - DAS Hotel Davos
106. Hotel Ambassador	133. AjoieSpa
107. Hôtel Du Pigne	134. Hotel Garni Testa Grigia
108. Kur & Ferienhaus Volksheilbad	135. The Dom Hotel
109. Hotel Adler Appenzell	136. Hotel frutt Lodge & Spa
110. Hotel Balm	137. Chalet des Alpes
111. Villmergen Swiss Quality Hotel	138. Berghotel Tgantieni
112. Hotel National	139. Hotel Garni Centro
113. TCS Hotel Bellavista	140. Microhotel
114. Hotel The Angels Lodge	141. Märchenhotel Bellevue
115. Hotel Kreuzlingen am Hafen	142. Reves Gourmands
116. Art & Genuss Hotel Albana	143. Hotel Gädi
117. Hotel Pollux	144. Parkhotel Beau-Site
118. Park Hotel Principe	145. Hotel Haus Homann
119. Haus Weibel	146. Hotel Sonne
120. Hotel Alpenblick	147. Mischabel Ferienwohnungen
121. Hotel Restaurant Crusch Alba	148. Hotel Bellerive
122. Romantik Hotel Stadthaus	149. Parkhotel Saas-Fee
Burgdorf	150. Hotel Edi

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have carried out this final research project on my own without any help other than the references listed in the list of references and that I have only used the sources mentioned. I will not provide a copy of this paper to a third party without the permission of the department head and of my advisor, including the partner company with which I collaborated on this project, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow: Roland Schegg, Eric Fassbind, Daniel Rousseau and Ariane Boesch.

Neuchâtel, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Giulia Robbiani